BOWIE VS BOLAN
TONY VISCONTI TELLS ALL

SINÉAD O'CONNOR
THE INCOMPARABLE REBEL

MOJO magazine

165 REVIEWS
JOHN MARTYN, NINA SIMONE, THE CORAL PRETENDERS & MORE

40TH ANNIVERSARY

THE FLOWERING OF...

The Smiths

"WE DIDN'T BELONG"

GRAM PARSONS
GRIEVOUS ANGEL

BOB MARLEY
UNSEEN!

HAWKWIND
THE ULTIMATE TRIP

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REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME

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+ HOW TO BUY THE BEE GEES

PLUS!
ARETHA FRANKLIN
NEIL YOUNG
PAUL RODGERS
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THIS NEW NOISE

TEST CARD RECORDINGS 2LP / CD

The newly remixed and remastered live recording of Public Service Broadcasting's acclaimed 2022 BBC Proms show at London's Royal Albert Hall with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Jules Buckley.

CLEAR POND RD

KRISTIN HERSH

CLEAR POND ROAD

FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

New solo album by Throwing Muses and 50FOOTWAVE's Kristin Hersh. A cinematic road trip; a series of personal vignettes sitting plush with strings and mellotron. "A musical genius" Huffington Post.

VANISHING TWIN

AFTERNOON X

FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

Exploring decidedly experimental territories, Vanishing Twin find themselves at an hypnotic juncture of minimalism, kosmiche, post-punk and dream-laden, psychedelic pop. "Both timely and timeless" The Wire

SPEED OF THE STARS

SPEED OF THE STARS

(STEVE KILBEY AND FRANK KEARNS)

SPEED OF THE STARS

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COLLABORATION BETWEEN STEVE KILBEY (THE CHURCH) and Frank Kearns (Cactus World News). CD & Limited Transparent Purple double vinyl set in deluxe gatefold sleeve. Totally sublime experience.

LORAINE JAMES

GENTLE CONFRONTATION

HYPERDUB 2LP / CD

Languid & enjoyably disjointed, Loraine James' unusual musical settings draw out sensitive & reflexive performances, criss-crossing watery ambience with denatured rhythm & asmr beats, delivering a totally unique vision of electronic pop music.

JLIN

PERSPECTIVE

PLANET MU LP / CD

Jlin's new mini-album "Perspective" works as a catch-up for those wanting new music from her, and wanting to hear how her sound is evolving. Tune in. There's much more ahead.

BLACK MARKET BRASS
HOX

BLACK MARKET BRASS

HOX

COLEMINE RECORDS LP / CD

Black Market Brass is proud to present Hox, their 3rd LP is a new take on afrobeat that combines traditional grooves with heavy, hypnotic, sci-fi sounds that reflect the band's myriad of influences as record collectors across genres.

Perfect Saviors

THE ARMED

PERFECT SAVIORS

SARGENT HOUSE LP / CD

The Armed return with their new album Perfect Saviors, the first new music since 2021 breakout release ULTRAPOP & featuring contributions from Julien Baker, Sarah Tudzin, Justin Meldal-Johnsen, Eric Avery, Stephen Perkins, Josh Klinghoffer and many more.

C.O.F.F.I.N
AUSTRALIA STOPS
FRESHWATER

C.O.F.F.I.N

AUSTRALIA STOPS

BAD VIBRATIONS RECORDS LP

Frenzied, high-voltage guitars, thumping rhythms & clever, captivating lyrics combine on 'Australia Stops', the hard-biting 5th studio album from Sydney punks C.O.F.F.I.N, channelling 1970's Australiana & boogie rock & roll

SWANSEA SOUND TWENTIETH CENTURY

SWANSEA SOUND

TWENTIETH CENTURY

SKEP WAX RECORDS LP / CD

Twelve glorious bursts of indiepop agitprop. Members of The Pooh Sticks, Heavenly, The Dentists and Death in Vegas bring the genre kicking and screaming into the Twenty-First Century.

GUM
saturnia

GUM

SATURNIA

SPINNING TOP LP / CD

GUM (aka Jay Watson of Pond) has treated us to some of the most sonically diverse explorations of the past decade. On the new album Saturnia, these visions have coalesced into Watson's richest, most coherent to date.

HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER
JUMP FOR JOY

HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER

JUMP FOR JOY

MERGE RECORDS LP / CD

"Something about Hiss Golden Messenger's music makes it feel like a golden-hued summer day even when it's not." —The New York Times

A GIANT DOG BITE

A GIANT DOG

BITE

MERGE RECORDS LP / CD

Welcome to Avalonia, a virtual utopia and the setting for the Austin glam punks' most fiery and awe-inspiring album to date.

Blind Boys of Alabama
Echoes of the South

BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA

ECHOES OF THE SOUTH

SINGLE LOCK RECORDS LP / CD

Pairing traditional spirituals & long-lost gospel classics with vintage soul & R&B tunes, they return with Echoes of the South, a collection as moving as it is timeless, transcending genre & era to touch something deep & fundamental about the human condition.

FILM SCHOOL FIELD

FILM SCHOOL

FIELD

FELTE LP

With over 2 decades in the industry, Field cements Film School as a distinct, dominant force in the shoegaze & psych scenes. Swirling colour, sustained guitars, darkened bass lines & urgent, percussive swells abound.

ASHA WELLS
WATER WORDS

ASHA WELLS

WATER WORDS

ROYAL OAKIE CD

Water Words is the debut album from non-binary artist Asha Wells, featuring atmospheric textures and haunting melodies set to thought provoking lyrics, calling to mind Kate Bush and Jeff Buckley.

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LONDON ✦ MEMPHIS ✦ STRETFORD

OCTOBER 2023 **ISSUE 359**

Getty

> “We went to the bar next door to see if Gram was there. Finally, we looked in the vocal booth, and there he was – passed out.”
> **GLEN HARDIN ON GRAM PARSONS, P50**

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32 BOB MARLEY Stirring portraits – some previously unpublished – of Marley and reggae’s aristocracy by Kate Simon: a taster from her expanded classic tome, Rebel Music.

40 BRIDGET ST JOHN The English folk rock icon and inspiration to a new generation of folk-adjacent stars steps into the light: “I always felt a bit separate from the scene.”

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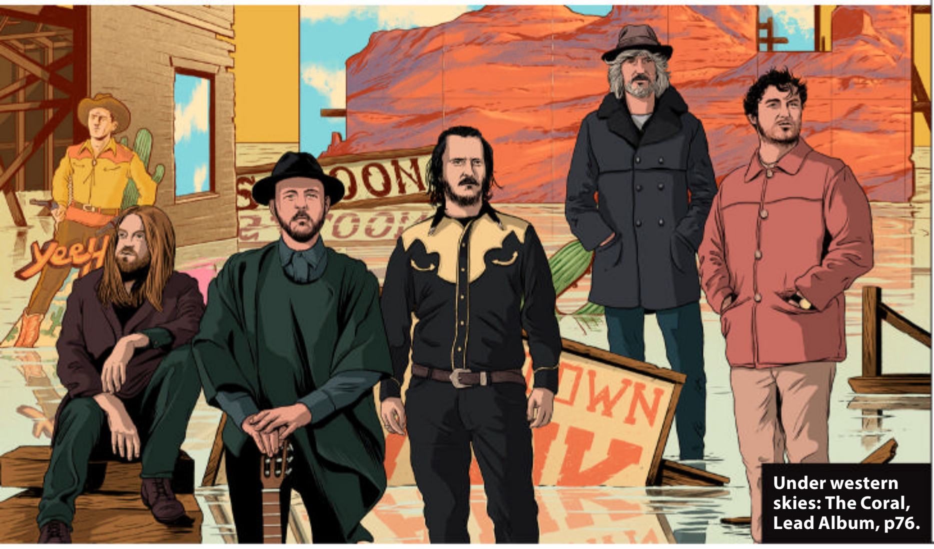
64 THE SMITHS Forty years on, MOJO revisits the sounds and the stories of a watershed band’s explosive arrival. “My brother said, ‘What kind of music is it? Funk? Punk… folk… rock?’” recalls drummer Mike Joyce. “I said, I can’t describe it.”

Horn of plenty: Herb Alpert confides in MOJO, p18.

CHROME DREAMS NEIL YOUNG

Betty Davis: queen of avant-funk, Lead Reissue, p90.



Under western skies: The Coral, Lead Album, p76.

MOJO

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9 ALL BACK TO MY PLACE Angélique Kidjo, Robin Trower and James Smith of Yard Act crank up their hi-fi systems.

104 REAL GONE Sinéad O'Connor, Jane Birkin, Tony Bennett, Lord Creator and more, we're going to miss you.

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14 NEIL YOUNG For the first time in four years he's touring the US again and playing deep cuts. Read on for what else the Coastal Tour entails, comment from support act Chris Pierce and an on-stage train set.

16 OMD Synth-pop veterans McCluskey and Humphreys have new LP *Bauhaus Staircase* to discuss: but why now, and what is it, and could this be their last one?

18 HERB ALPERT The 'A' in A&M, boss trumpet of the Tijuana Brass, and all-round boho looks back on 66 years in the biz. His secret? "Honesty is the key," he confides.

20 BUSH TETRAS The cult "dark weirdos" of no wave NYC are back with a new record and it could be their best. How did they get here? Founders Cynthia Sley and Pat Place reflect on the wisdom of taking your time.

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76 NEW ALBUMS The Coral take a look at themselves in the mirror, plus Pretenders, Teenage Fanclub, Alice Cooper, Mitski and more.

90 REISSUES Celebrating the 50th anniversary of Betty Davis's debut, plus Sparklehorse, Nina Simone, Breeders and more.

103 BOOKS In conversation with iconoclastic songwriter/storyteller John Prine, plus Bunnyman Will Sergeant's second memoir and the turbulent story of Oi!.

MOJO ISSN 1351-0193 (USPS 17424) is published 12 times a year by H Bauer Publishing Ltd, Media House, Peterborough Business Park, Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 6EA United Kingdom. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container INC 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MOJO, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container INC 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Bauer Media, Subscriptions, CDS Global, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Lathkill Street, Market Harborough, Leicester LE16 9EF, United Kingdom. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE...

Kate Simon

Photographer Kate's subjects, for magazines including Disc, Sounds and Interview, have ranged from Elton John to William Burroughs, while her portraits of Bob Marley and other stars of Jamaican music are some of the most potent ever captured. The cream of them, and her commentary, can be enjoyed from page 32.

Grayson Haver Currin

While Grayson camped in Joshua Tree National Park one night near where the body of Gram Parsons was burned, a bobcat approached his tent, growling repeatedly. His exploration of Parsons' two solo LPs (see page 50) was written in a tent, as he hikes the Continental Divide Trail across the US.

Victoria Segal

While working for Melody Maker in the '90s, Victoria was introduced to Stephen Hawking; his opening gambit: "Blur or Oasis?" Her time at MOJO began with a Bonnie 'Prince' Billy LP in 2003 and comes up to date this month with a review of The Coral's new album (page 76) and a conversation with Blake Mills (page 46).

Getty, Joe Wilson

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SAT	21	CARDIFF ST. DAVID'S HALL
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T SOLD OUT	6	BATH THE FORUM
F SOLD OUT	7	BOURNEMOUTH PAVILION THEATRE
SAT	28	OXFORD NEW THEATRE
MON	30	SOUTHEND CLIFFS PAVILION
TUE	31	READING THE HEXAGON

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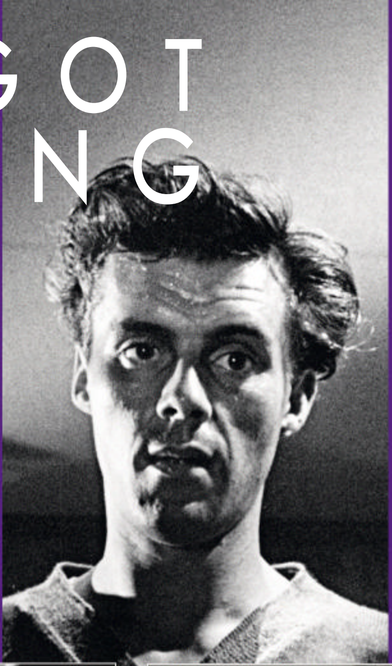

MOJO PRESENTS 15 INDIE CLASSICS FROM THE 1980s

THE FALL, THE SUGARCUBES, THE WEDDING PRESENT, SHOP ASSISTANTS & MORE!

1 THE WEDDING PRESENT

MY FAVOURITE DRESS

"Some rare delight in Manchester town," sputters David Gedge, consolidating his status as Morrissey heir apparent. Quintessential Northernness and kitchen-sink heartbreak were familiar touchstones, but the Weddoes' excellence was built on Gedge's bluff relatability and those frantic guitars.

Written by Gedge. Published by David Gedge. Administered by Sentric Music outside Eire & UK, except Canada & US: administered by Superior Music. ℗&©1987 Reception Records/Play It Again Sam. From *George Best* (Reception Records/PIAS)

2 THE BODINES

THERESE

By 1986, a post-Smiths British indie scene had firmly developed in pub backrooms and via John Peel sessions, codified by NME's *C86* compilation. At its forefront: Derbyshire's Bodines, jangling torchbearers on the Creation label. The breathless gush of second single Therese is their apotheosis; by 1990, they were done.

Written by Ryan. Publisher – Cherry Red Songs ISRC CODE – GBBLY1401124. ℗1986 Cherry Red Records. Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

3 THE SUGARCUBES

BIRTHDAY

A left-field sensation upon release in 1987, The Sugarcubes' UK debut had the Icelanders instantly deified. Few could've predicted, though, that its uncanny, ingenuous sense of wonder would set the template for Björk's career, still potent 36 years later.

Written by Erlingsson, Baldursson, Olafsson, Benediktsson, Jonsson, Gudmundsdottir. Published by Kobalt Music Publishing. ℗&©1988 One Little Independent Records. From *Life's Too Good* (One Little Independent Records) https://www.olirecords.com/

4 THE FALL

LOOK, KNOW

"What is also so appealing about Mark E Smith is that he shows compassion, which is a rare thing right now," Morrissey told Melody Maker in 1983 – not a quality often attributed to the Fall frontman. Exhibit A: this vicious evisceration of fashion casualties from 1982.

Written by Smith, Riley, Hanley, Burns, Carroll. Publisher – BMG Rights Management (UK) Ltd ISRC CODE – GBBLY1603548. ℗1982 Cherry Red. Records issued under license from Mark E Smith. Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

9 THE VASELINES

SON OF A GUN

Back to Glasgow, and a duo of Eugene Kelly and Frances McKee, whose name was suggested by Stephen Pastel. Initially a charming footnote, The Vaselines became far more famous – and presumably richer – than most of their contemporaries when superfan Kurt Cobain covered this and two other songs.

Written by Eugene Kelly and Frances McKee. Published by Complete Music Ltd (ASCAP). ℗&©1992 Sub Pop Records. From *The Way Of The Vaselines* (Sub Pop Records); www.subpop.com/

10 RED GUITARS

GOOD TECHNOLOGY

Glowering mainstays of Radio 1's evening shows in the mid '80s – and a Smiths support act in early 1984 – the Hull band's mix of post-punk and township jive marked them out as outliers on the indie circuit. This 1983 debut sold a now-unimaginable 60,000 copies; the re-formed Red Guitars tour the UK in September.

Written by Ross, Lewis, Duffy-Howard, Higgins, Rowley, Kidd. Published by BMG Rights Management (Uk) Limited. ℗&©Self Drive Records 2023. From the EP Good Technology (Self Drive Records); https://red-guitars.com/

11 THE THREE JOHNS

DEATH OF THE EUROPEAN (12″ MIX)

Jon Langford made a key appearance on last month's *Punk Nuggets* CD with The Mekons, and here he is again as one-third of the excellent Three Johns, very roughly West Yorkshire's correlative to Big Black. Number 14 in Peel's Festive 50 for 1985, chart fans!

Written by Jon Langford, John Hyatt and Phillip Brennan. Published by Low Noise America Music in North America, administered by Domino Publishing Co for the Rest of the World. From *Volume* (Buried Treasure Records, 2016) Courtesy of The Three Johns

12 BRADFORD

SKIN STORM

Imitation is evidently the sincerest form of flattery, given Morrissey's support for Bradford – from Blackburn, confusingly. The indolence, chime and sentiments are indebted to The Smiths, but it's a terrific single nevertheless. Bradford subsequently supported Morrissey at his debut solo gig and signed to Smiths producer Stephen Street's Foundation label, splitting in 1991 before re-forming in 2019.

Written by Hodgson. Published by Acacia Publishing Ltd ISRC Code - GBBLY8900217. ℗1988 Cherry Red Records Ltd. Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

Getty (2), Shutterstock, Alamy (2), Joe Shutter, Ian Tilton (2), Peter Anderson, Phil Nicholls, Courtesy of The Vaselines, Sonic Rob Kerford, Miki Berenyi, AJ Wilkinson, Mark Flunder

IN JULY 1979, STEVEN MORRISSEY WROTE ONE OF HIS FREQUENT, precocious letters to the NME. "I've just seen The Cramps and they're at that funny stage," he announced. "This is the kind of group that start revolutionary outrages and all that."

Four years later, Morrissey was fomenting his very own revolutionary outrages (and all that), as The Smiths began their brief and extraordinary career. But while Morrissey's rhetoric often revolved around his band's isolated otherness, and the supposed paucity of good, honest guitar music to counteract glossy chart pop, The Smiths were not really that alone.

Our latest MOJO compilation, *You've Got Everything Now*, provides a rich sampler of the alternative '80s. It's a time when the energies and angles of punk and post-punk were dovetailing into older and more romantic musical traditions. Where emotional vulnerability and technical naivety became badges of honour. And where the evening DJs on BBC Radio 1 – John Peel, David Jensen and Janice Long – found a wealth of great music to play in between all those Smiths sessions. "As merry as the days were long…"

YOU'VE GOT EVERYTHING NOW
MOJO PRESENTS 15 INDIE CLASSICS FROM THE 1980s
THE FALL, THE SUGARCUBES, THE WEDDING PRESENT, SHOP ASSISTANTS & MORE!

5 THE MONOCHROME SET
THE JET SET JUNTA

One of the relatively scarce contemporary bands approved of by Morrissey and Johnny Marr, Londoners The Monochrome Set had been finessing a brand of literate, eccentric guitar pop since 1978; a project that continues to this day. Note the groovy whistling intro to this 1982 favourite.

Written by Bid, Square, Warren. Publisher – Cherry Red Songs ISRC Code – GBBLY8200130. ℗1982 Cherry Red Records Ltd. Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

6 SHOP ASSISTANTS
ALL DAY LONG

Morrissey also approved of Shop Assistants, Edinburgh fuzzpop archetypes who amplified the girl group sweetness at the heart of The Jesus And Mary Chain's noise maelstrom. All Day Long kicked off their 1985 Shopping Parade EP, heralding a swift first life that was over by 1987.

Written by David Keegan, Sarah Kneale, Laura McPhail, Alex Taylor. Published by Hallin Music Ltd and © 1986 Chrysalis Records Limited. From *Will Anything Happen*.

7 THE PASTELS
TRUCK TRAIN TRACTOR

Shop Assistants shared a member or two with The Pastels, a Glasgow institution who've been an inspirational and supportive constant in indie circles since 1981. The Pastels have long been associated with proudly asserted fragility, but this 1986 single finds them at their most robust and insistent: more steamroller than truck, train or tractor.

Written by Stephen McRobbie. Published by Momentum Music/Universal Music. ℗&©1993 The Pastels/Fire Records. From *Truckload Of Trouble*

8 THE BRILLIANT CORNERS
MEET ME ON TUESDAYS

Taking their name from a Thelonious Monk album betrayed musical tastes beyond the '80s norm but, trumpet apart, Bristol's Brilliant Corners were giddy and undervalued mid-'80s indie mainstays. Note Davey Woodward's endearingly gauche romanticism, in a tonal sweet spot between Morrissey and Felt's Lawrence.

Written by Woodward. Published by Copyright Control. ISRC Code - GBBLY0903409. ℗1986 Brilliant Corners. Exclusively licensed to Cherry Red Records Ltd. Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

13 THE JUNE BRIDES
EVERY CONVERSATION

Progenitors of a sound that would eventually be called 'cutie' or 'shambling', the London-based June Brides boldly turned down a slot on the NME's *C86* comp. Support slots with The Smiths followed, along with a cult following that encompassed both Manic Street Preacher Nicky Wire and US author Dave Eggers.

Written by P. Wilson. Published by Cherry Red Songs. ℗1984 The Pink Label. ©The June Brides. This remaster from the forthcoming album *Completism* (Occultation Recordings); www.occultation.co.uk

14 THE LOFT
WHY DOES THE RAIN

The ninth single released on Creation Records (one by The Pastels was number five), The Loft only managed one more record in their short first act before splitting, spectacularly, in the middle of a gig at Hammersmith Palais. Singer Pete Astor and drummer Dave Morgan revisited this exceptional song in 1988 with their subsequent band The Weather Prophets.

Written by Astor. Publisher – Complete Music Ltd ISRC Code – GBBLY0501082. ℗1984 Creation Records. Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

15 THE WALTONES
SHE LOOKS RIGHT THROUGH ME

Perhaps the most obscure track on *You've Got Everything Now* – a little mystifying, given the Manchester band's keen grasp of the Byrdsian jangles and harmonies so beloved on the scene. A striking second single from 1987; guitarist Mark Collins would go on to much greater success as a key member of The Charlatans for over three decades.

Written by Lee. Published by Matthew Lee ISRC Code - GBBLY0607158. ℗1987 Cherry Red Records Ltd. Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

"WE DIDN'T BELONG IN THE 1980s."

THE DAWN OF THE SMITHS

STARTS PAGE 64

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WHERE THE WORLD COMES TO PLAY

Angélique Kidjo

FRANCO-BENINESE TRAILBLAZER

What music are you currently grooving to?

I am always listening to music, all sorts, non-stop, but at the moment it's **KC & The Sunshine Band** and **The O'Jays** – (*sings*) "Money money money!" [For The Love Of Money]

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Bob Marley & The Wailers' *Survival*. It is so powerful, from the cover with the African flags to a song like So Much Trouble In The World, it still speaks the truth. When I first heard Bob Marley it was a shock. I was at high school and what he was saying and his messages, it was like talking to a friend. And when he died, it was like the light of hope and freedom was turned off.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

The first record I got, I was about nine or 10, and my dad brought it home for me, a **Miriam Makeba** album.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

I never wanted to be a musician. I wanted to be a human rights lawyer or a surgeon, but I sang from the beginning. My parents thought I was never going to speak, just sing through life instead.

What do you sing in the shower?

I warm up my voice with scales.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

There are so many… **Bill Withers**' Ain't No Sunshine, **Aretha Franklin**'s Respect, **Whitney Houston**'s I Wanna Dance With Somebody.

And your Sunday morning record?

I love **Bach**, so his Fifth Symphony, but it could also be **Cole Porter**, some **Frank Sinatra**, some **Ella Fitzgerald**.

Angélique Kidjo plays a 40th anniversary concert at Royal Albert Hall on November 17.

ALL BACK TO MY PLACE

THE STARS REVEAL THE SONIC DELIGHTS GUARANTEED TO GET THEM GOING…

James Smith

YARD ACT'S ACHTUNG-SPIELER

What music are you currently grooving to?

Beauties by **Aselefech Ashine & Getenesh Kebret**, which is sort of like Ethiopia's answer to Motown, and *Ghosteen* by **Nick Cave**, which moves me much more than it grooves me.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

I almost felt embarrassed to say this, like it was too clichéd to say, but it's still *After The Gold Rush* by **Neil Young**. The subject matter, the yearning, the mourning, it feels more important now than ever. Timeless.

Fabrice Mabillot, Shutterstock

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

The self-titled **Gorillaz** album, from the Music Zone in the Trafford Centre, Manchester. I wasn't really into music before this, I had singles, and was tuned into the charts, but this changed my life and I'm forever indebted to it. I've heard more and more artists of my age name-check this album as an important turning point in their lives. Between Gorillaz and **Beck**, I think they opened the doors for the post-tribalism we now take as a given in good modern pop music.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Bootsy Collins.

What do you sing in the shower?

I often hum the bass line to The Night by **Frankie Valli And The Four Seasons** whilst scrubbing my pits.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

We've been DJing a lot of late and it's such a joyous and exciting experience. I'm forever battling with myself as to when the optimum moment is on a night to drop Walking On Sunshine by **Rockers Revenge**.

And your Sunday morning record?

Sunday morning sessions are sacred in our house. We get through a lot, but the ***Roberta Flack & Donny Hathaway*** album, particularly the tune Be Real Black For Me, and also *Designer* by **Aldous Harding**, neither are ever too far from the turntable.

Yard Act play the Reading/Leeds festival on August 25 and 26. New single The Trench Coat Museum is out now.

Robin Trower

BLUES ROCK GUITAR ACE

What music are you currently grooving to?

Dinah Washington's *Greatest Hits*. She's the most natural vocalist, and very soulful. And when I'm out in the car, a lot of popular music from the 1930s and 1940s. There's a very early **Bing Crosby** track that I always return to, Out Of Nowhere, which is wonderful.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

James Brown's *Live At The Apollo*. That's the one. Incredibly exciting music. He was at his peak, Mr Dynamite, no doubt about it. I think he's my favourite male singer, apart from maybe **Howlin' Wolf**.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

The first one I actually put my own money down for might have been – it's a long time ago! – Git It by **Gene Vincent**, from a shop in Southend-On-Sea that might have been called Gilbert's. They sold pianos and instruments as well as records.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Albert King, my favourite guitar player. Not only did he have probably the best tone ever, but every phrase is beautiful.

What do you sing in the shower?

Lines from new songs that I'm working on.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Little Richard, Lucille. Incredibly up, a great track to bop about to. I always think of him as a king of rock'n'roll. I was on the same bill as him in the 1970s in the States – a crazy man! I didn't say hello, you don't really want to meet your idols, do you?

And your Sunday morning record?

Bryan Ferry's *Mamouna*. It's got a lovely vibe, when you try to just groove. I worked on it, so it has a special place in my heart. I'll be looking forward to a roast dinner and we'll obviously be watching some football later.

The 50th Anniversary Deluxe Edition of Robin Trower's Twice Removed From Yesterday is out now on Chrysalis.

> "Little Richard's Lucille is a great track to bop about to."
>
> ROBIN TROWER

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FOR MANY OF US, IT WILL SEEM LIKE only yesterday, or the day before. As is the way with time, though, a scarcely-believable 40 years have passed since The Smiths buccaneered their way into our collective consciousness. Armed with gladioli and the most insidious riffs, flaunting an aesthetic at odds with rock's macho norms, The Smiths released Hand In Glove in May 1983. "I didn't think this was going to be one of the most important groups there's ever been," their label boss Geoff Travis admitted, "but I thought it was a great record." By the autumn, an even greater follow-up – This Charming Man – had landed them in the UK Top 30 and on Top Of The Pops, and a debut album was nearing completion. "They were very, very beautiful times, in terms of what we created," Mike Joyce told MOJO in May, following the death of his bandmate Andy Rourke.

This month we reel back to the dawn of The Smiths, as Tom Doyle uncovers the musical innovations that powered those extraordinary early records. "My brother said, 'What kind of music is it? Funk? Punk… folk… rock?'" Mike Joyce remembers. "[I said], I don't know. I can't describe it."

As ever, we'll do our best to describe it instead – a job we've been grappling with for three decades now. MOJO turns 30 next month, and as this issue goes to bed, our work begins on putting together MOJO 360 to mark that auspicious birthday. "This one is different because it's us…"

JOHN MULVEY, EDITOR

If we were in our world, I'd say to you, Let's have a drink

I would like to thank you with all my heart for the excellent send-off you gave to my friend Tony McPhee [MOJO 358]. The Groundhogs were a huge part of my teenage listening experience. In terms of widespread recognition Tony was always to be at the cutting edge, and yet for some unexplained reason he never achieved the status achieved by Rory Gallagher. Perhaps he was too much of his own man. When Tony re-formed the Groundhogs in the mid-'80s they played their comeback gig at the Half Moon in Putney and it was packed to the gunwales.

I attended all their London gigs, and over a period he and I became quite friendly. One night he sheepishly asked if he could crash at mine – it was a no-brainer. Every time he played in London I put him up. He was a lovely man, quiet unassuming and very humble, and never did he have a single bad word to say about anyone. It is heartwarming to see that he has received so many accolades from bands like Pavement and Arctic Monkeys. Tony would be chuffed. It was a great honour to have known him – hands down he was one of the greatest guitarists Britain ever produced.

Barry Winton, via e-mail

The excessive is never ridiculous

Wow, it takes an awful lot for me to put pen to paper – OK, send an e-mail to my favourite music magazine. But MOJO 358, with Siouxsie on the cover, was immense. MOJO has produced one of the best ever CD freebies, with *Punk Nuggets*. In my opinion this is the best ever punk compilation that does not include any of the big hitters like The Clash, The Stranglers etc. The Nosebleeds' debut is an absolute stonker. Keep it up, guys.

Gary Bragg, Chester

…1-2-3-4-Bish-Bash-Bosh! What a punktastic delight of golden nuggies pogoed right out of your MOJO 358 CD, *Punk Nuggets*. MOJO, it's one of your strongest yet – well done! As a mere 64-year-old, it took me straight back to when I witnessed first-hand DIY bands as a teen. Living then in rural Lincolnshire, yes I'd travelled to see The Clash and The Damned live, yet often the local college scene gave us yokels just as good – Suburban Studs, The Cigarettes, The Scientists. Great daze.

Simon Mullins, Suffolk

This is the zone. It consists of the memories of men.

Drums Over London by The Disco Zombies on the MOJO 358 CD took me back to Leicester University in the late 1970s, when I lived in the same hall of residence as Andy Ross. I wasn't one of his mates, but we had a mutual singer-songwriter friend. I remember seeing the DZs do Open Channel D, Mr Waverly at a gig in the bar or dining hall, where at other times the likes of Roogalator also played. At the university students' union we saw, among others, Steve Hillage, Roy Harper (with guest David Gilmour!) and Neil Ardley. Along the road from the campus, De Montfort Hall hosted The Jam, Blue Öyster Cult, Barclay James Harvest, Genesis and The Chieftains. Henry Cow played at the Phoenix Theatre. Those were the days!

Thanks for the magazine. It's been a constant in my life for 30 years, from issue 1. Long may you keep on running.

Dr Philip Duce, Wigston, Leicestershire

You've come to put your head into the lion's mouth

In the early '90s as an indie kid I bought Siouxsie And The Banshees' *Superstition* after reading a positive review. At the time it was contemporary to Curve and I loved it, but never ventured further with Siouxsie's back catalogue, so thank you for uncovering.

Andrew Turner, via e-mail

Who are we to say what is poetic and what isn't?

Just been listening to one of the greatest albums of symphonic pop ever conceived, Lewis Taylor's *The Lost Album* [MOJO 358]. It's steeped in a historical reverence of Crosby, Stills & Nash, Todd Rundgren and The Beach Boys, paying dutiful homage in a most sublimely beautiful manner. This greengrocer from north London is an undiscovered great, deserving an equal measure of respect now paid to Nick Drake, Gram Parsons and Gene Clark. I urge MOJO readers (so diligent and informed) to check Lewis Taylor out, starting with this near-perfect record.

DC Kneath, Swansea

Where's the princess?

First of all, what a cracking Stax CD on the cover [MOJO 357]. Homer Banks's If You're Ready (Come Go With Me): what a record, what words – perfection! Thank you! But why does the loss of Tina Turner in May 2023 not warrant a front cover instead of a passport-sized photograph in the top right hand corner? Bruce Springsteen is a wonderful American icon of music, but does he – like The Beatles, the Stones, Small Faces, Paul Weller etc – not grace the cover far too often? Why can't a powerful woman of colour take centre stage? Indeed, is it not time to pay homage to singers such as Gladys Knight and Mavis Staples for lifelong services to powerful music with soul? Just one B-side of Tina's – I'll Keep You Happy from the 1965 45 River Deep, Mountain High – blows the vast majority of white rock groups into imposter oblivion.

I have bought every single edition of the fabulous MOJO magazine, stretching back to my student days almost 30 years ago. This is the first time I've felt the need to write directly to all of MOJO's editors with any mild criticism whatsoever.

Paul Michael Gallagher, Belfast

He's a genius and all geniuses have their whims

Never heard of Wreckless Eric but greatly enjoyed his appreciation of Ornette Coleman's *The Art Of The Improvisers* album [MOJO 357]. More power to his elbow, I say!

Michael Steels, via e-mail

I have a strong distaste for rebels

I enjoyed some great features in last month's MOJO 358 on Nils Lofgren, Paul Simon, Suede, Mark Volman and Mott The Hoople. Just a pity you spoiled it with yet another article on that whingeing talentless wanker John Lydon. And talking of talentless, Siouxsie on the cover – really? There are so many other artists that you've never put on the cover that are more deserving: Todd Rundgren, 10cc, Gerry Rafferty, Genesis, The Mamas And The Papas, Billy Joel.

Gordon Barclay, via e-mail

I'm no longer in the rat race

Hey! That's Peter Lawford next to John Lennon on page 70 of your MOJO 356. Doesn't he also deserve a mention? For shame – and a fellow countryman…

T Mantovi, via e-mail

Silence moves faster when it's going backward

I just wanted to say thanks for including me in MOJO 357 – the crossword, 30 across – most chuffed. I don't think I have had a mention for a while. Be really lovely if you reviewed another album at some point (one of mine was 'folk album of the month', in 1997 or thereabouts). Whatever, the mention was much appreciated.

Robb Johnson, via e-mail

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WHAT GOES ON!

THE HOT NEWS AND BIZARRE STORIES FROM PLANET **MOJO**

Do the white thing: (left) Yoko One in her Half-A-Room installation at Lisson Gallery, London, 1967; (above) flower power: Ono and John Lennon during their Montreal Bed-in, 1969.

Feeling The Space

Snip! Saw! Bum? The Tate Modern readies a major **Yoko Ono** retrospective.

NEXT FEBRUARY, London's Tate Modern gallery will launch a retrospective exhibition covering six decades of Yoko Ono's artistic output, highlighting the nonagenarian's ability to weave together conceptualism with activism in "poetic, humorous and radical ways."

The show will pivot around some of Ono's most infamous works, such as Cut Piece (1964), in which audience members were invited to systematically scissor off the artist's clothing, Half-A-Room (1967), an installation of household objects sawn in half and painted white, the missing halves appearing as words attached to a row of bottles (an idea of John Lennon's), and her once-censored cine-document of naked posteriors, Film No. 4 (Bottoms) (1966-67).

When gallerist John Dunbar invited John Lennon to visit the basement of London's Indica Bookshop in November 1966 to preview Ono's exhibition Unfinished Paintings, the 20th century's most fiercely dissected personal/creative union was instigated. Had Lennon stayed home, it might be that Ono's name would now be associated with the 1960s Fluxus art movement, whose credo, according to leading practitioner George Maciunas, was to "promote living art, anti-art… which can be grasped by all people".

It's a principle with which Ono's early instructional performance pieces resonated, even if she demurred when invited to become a card-carrying Fluxus artist. What's for certain is that, via the conduit of Lennon, her 'living, anti-art' approach would inculcate radical creative concepts – especially disruptive 'happenings' – in the wider public consciousness with an efficacy that even storied Fluxus artists like Joseph Beuys or Nam June Paik must have envied. Typically, 1969's brace of Bed-ins For Peace, in which Ono and Lennon spent a week beneath the covers in the Amsterdam Hilton and Montreal's Queen Elizabeth Hotel respectively, inviting in the media to discuss ending the Vietnam War, would make global front page news. While the bed-ins, like the couple's Fluxus-like 'Bagism' events, invited criticism, some of it racist, the spectacle undoubtedly put the peace agenda on the breakfast table.

"Yoko and I are quite willing to be the world's clowns," Lennon avers in the documentary Imagine: John Lennon; "if by doing it we do some good."

All of which failed to assuage indignant, if not misogynist, Beatles fans, who, when not blaming Ono for ushering in the band's demise, were deriding the dissonant qualities of her musical collaborations with Lennon, beginning with the duo's experimental late-'60s *Unfinished Music* LPs. In fact, Ono's fealty to 'art music' was longstanding and her untrammelled vocal style indebted to the atonal serialism of composer Alan Berg and the aleatoric methodology of John Cage.

> "The direction I was going in was not crazy…"
> **YOKO ONO**

"What Cage gave me was a confidence that the direction I was going in was not crazy…" Ono explained to critic Hans Ulrich Obrist in 2001. "It was accepted in the world called 'the avant-garde'. That was an eye-opener for me."

Ono's devotion to conceptualism, as much as her peace activism, will be leitmotifs of the Tate retrospective, all of it confirming her status as a foundational female art figurehead. As performance artist Ann Magnuson told PopMatters in 2021: "People joked [Ono's] voice could shatter glass, but it was her spirit that shattered many an artistic glass ceiling."

David Sheppard

Yoko Ono runs at the Tate Modern, London, from February 15 to September 1, 2024.

Clay Perry ©Yoko Ono, Ivor Sharp ©Yoko Ono Lennon

Bringing the love: Neil Young on-stage (train set out of sight) at the Greek Theatre, Berkeley, July 15, 2023.

NEIL YOUNG RELAXES INTO HIS RARITIES-PACKED COASTAL TOUR

"IT'S OVER," Neil Young declared on his website in 2019. "Concert tours are not what they were." They were "no longer fun", and his inbox was overflowing with complaints over the inflated cost of tickets – not to mention the cost to the environment. Since lockdown, he and wife Daryl Hannah holed up in their Colorado cabin, where Young played in front of the fire any song he fancied. Hannah filmed these "down-home" performances which were streamed as the 'Fireside Sessions'.

Four years later and he's back on the road for what feels like an extended Fireside Sessions-on-wheels. His 'Coastal' solo tour started in LA on July 1 then headed up the coast. The 90-minute sets were mostly made up of songs he'd rarely, or never, sung on-stage, plus a few classics (when MOJO catches the show at Berkeley's Greek Theatre on July 15, these number Ohio, Comes A Time, Mr Soul and Heart Of Gold). Venues were relatively intimate and homey. On the low-lit stage a small model train chugged around an old fireplace: Young, dressed like he'd just came home from work, wore an old plaid shirt, ancient jeans and a train-conductor's cap.

"I was immediately struck by the train," says Chris Pierce, Young's opening act on the tour, "because I come from a long line of folks that have worked on trains in the South. My grandfather was a railroad porter." A longtime fan of Young's, the singer-songwriter found himself in the best seat in the house. "The very first night he played Don't Forget Love [from *Barn*] and I broke down in tears. I've had a lot of ups and downs in my career and hearing that message over and over was a really important moment in my life."

Love definitely seemed a theme of the tour; maybe it helped having his wife travel with him. An illuminated sign on-stage read 'LOVE', and in-between songs he chatted away warmly about old friends including Crosby and Stills: the latter gave Young the Martin he was playing.

"He was telling stories about the instruments, where he got them, or who gave them to him, and he was playing stuff he really wanted to play. A great lesson of the tour for me," says Pierce, "was how important the songs that we write are in our hearts, and to play them how we want to do it."

The other theme of the show – a long-time cause – was the environment. Young sang Mother Earth like it was a hymn. In the first of two encores, which included a goosepimplingly good Four Strong Winds by his late fellow Canadian Ian Tyson, he conducted the audience in a sing-along of Love Earth.

This was Young at his most laid-back in years. "A lot went into this, we practised a lot," he quipped as he meandered between pump organ, Steinway grand and electric keyboard, as well as acoustic and electric guitars. "It was a lovely example of where he is in his heart right now," says Pierce. "I think for anyone who witnessed it, it was a sacred moment in time."

> "A lot went into this, we practised a lot…"
> **NEIL YOUNG**

Sylvie Simmons

Neil Young With Crazy Horse's Odeon Budokan is released on Reprise on September 1. The same day Chris Pierce's Let All Who Will is released by Friends At Work/Downtown Distribution.

GIMME FIVE… SONGS ABOUT EINSTEIN

Big Audio Dynamite

Albert Einstein Meets The Human Beatbox

(CBS, 1986)

Where B.A.D's $E=MC^2$ gets mouth music layered over it by human beatboxers Clement and Sipho. For more rap relativity, see also Keith LeBlanc's Einstein and Earthling's I Still Love Albert Einstein.

Randy Newman

Sigmund Freud's Impersonation Of Albert Einstein In America

(WARNER BROS., 1977)

Freud's dream analyses, Einstein's scientific discoveries, the American century, migration, play-acting, hope, fate, baseball in the rain… Newman rolls them all up.

Silicon Dream

Albert Einstein – Everything Is Relative

(BLOW UP, 1987)

West German dance novelty – mainman Klaus dressed up as a white-faced version of the $E=MC^2$ OG in a fright wig – which recasts Einstein as, er, "Professor of Love". Less successful than Landscape's 1981 smash Einstein A Go-Go.

The Dark

Einstein's Brain

(FRESH, 1981)

Islington punks naturally assimilated into goth play a Damned-ish nerve-scraper imagining the 1921 Nobel Prize Winner's preserved brain in a jar, tutting at the perversion of his discoveries. A later live version features drums by Hanoi Rocks' Razzle.

Gussie P

Einstein's Theory Of Dub

(GUSSIE P, 1994)

The bass operator lets thunder crash before letting loose the digi-dub and bubbling sound effects, while reciting the title in dramatic fashion. Did the great theoretical physicist *have* a Theory Of Dub? Answers on a postcard.

Joey Martinez

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tom speight

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SAT 11 **BRISTOL** O$_2$ ACADEMY
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Synth you've been gone: (left) OMD's Andy McCluskey with his trusty Korg; (above) Paul Humphreys at work in his studio in France.

OMD RETURN – BUT IS IT THEIR LAST STAND?

IN ANDY McCLUSKEY's Northern Electric studio – based at his home on the Wirral – there is Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark's first, still-functional Korg M500 Micro Preset synth from 1979. "It sits on top of a chest of drawers," says McCluskey, "reminding me of where I came from. When the band re-formed [in 2006] we bought another one to cannibalise for parts, but we forgot to tell each other we were bidding against each other on eBay for it…"

McCluskey and OMD partner Paul Humphreys, who works out of his Bleep Works set-up in the south of France, have got over greater hurdles during their 45-year-with-the-odd-hiatus career in synth-pop. In fact, they shouldn't be readying new album *Bauhaus Staircase* at all. "Myself and Paul had swore blind to each other that we were done after [warmly-received 2017 LP] *The Punishment Of Luxury*," says McCluskey. "We wanted to have fun smelling the roses planted throughout our lives instead…"

> **"I want to kick down fascist art."**
> **ANDY McCLUSKEY**

Then, in 2020, came the pandemic. Frustrated and with a newly boosted computer set-up ideal for remote working, McCluskey started working on songs. Over the next 12 months an album formed. "Covid made me rediscover the creative power of total bloody boredom," he laughs. "It ever was that the bulk of the work comes from me – I'm a control freak – and once I've wrestled something into a final shape, Paul will give me things. There are 12 tracks on the album, I think seven or eight Paul has contributed to in terms of writing."

He also sent the tracks to Humphreys for mixing. "I mix for feel, Paul mixes for sonic clarity," he says. "[My studio] is a glorified programming room, but Paul's is a *proper* studio, it's absolutely perfect and he is incredibly fastidious." However, Humphreys' personal situation – he recently became a father again – meant considerable delay. "It's been excruciatingly frustrating because I've waited two years for Paul to mix it!" says McCluskey.

That said, he declares himself delighted with the results. Song-wise, Anthropocene relates to the current geological epoch created by human activity; Kleptocracy, which was based on an idea from 2015, analyses capital and its corrosive effect on democracy; Slow Train revels in synthetic glam rock. Healing, meanwhile, refers to the better human qualities witnessed during Covid. Notably, two tracks were mixed by David Watts, whose "crunchy, wild sound" McCluskey admires.

Bauhaus Staircase also continues their habit of referencing artworks, in this case the 1932 painting by Bauhaus tutor Oskar Schlemmer that was later copied by Roy Lichtenstein. "In difficult times, politicians go, 'Cut back on spending on the arts,'" says McCluskey, a trustee of National Museums Liverpool. "The reality is that when times are hard you most need the creative arts to feed your soul. Also, the bastard Nazis shut down the Bauhaus, so there's also a reference to, I want to kick down fascist art."

And after this? "I don't think we can crunch ourselves hard enough to squeeze out the good stuff any more," concludes McCluskey. "So if it is the last album, it wouldn't be a bad one to finish on."

Ian Harrison

FACT SHEET

Title: *Bauhaus Staircase*

Due: autumn

Songs: Anthropocene/Kleptocracy/Slow Train/Healing/Evolution Of Species

The Buzz: "We're only going to release something if we think it's good and of value and worth listening to. I think this is a very, very strong album… unusually for me, there's quite a few songs that are about care, and help and comfort, and kindness."

Andy McCluskey

ALSO WORKING

…his touring days may be done, but **ELTON JOHN** (right) informed the Hollywood Reporter, "I'll be recording a new album very soon, and I can't wait because I haven't really recorded a proper record for a long time, so I'm looking forward to doing that," he said, adding that he'd like to collaborate with new talents **Ryan Beatty**, **Joesef** and **Saint Harison**. "Those three young kids are just phenomenal," he added …after finishing **BLUR**'s *The Ballad Of Darren*, **Damon Albarn** is now working on music for Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's incomplete libretto from 1807, The Magic Flute Part II (a sequel to Mozart's opera of 1791). He told the Broken Record Podcast, "the sequel… never got put to music. It's this legendary lost thing" …soul singer **ANITA BAKER**, who's returned to live performance and is lining up European dates, is promising new music this year and has shared clips from the studio… a photo from Oslo's Urban Sounds Studios from earlier in the summer suggests a new **GUNS N' ROSES** studio project is underway… **THE STREETS** release their first LP for 12 years in October: *The Darker The Shadow, The Brighter The Light* is accompanied by a film starring and directed by mainman **Mike Skinner** …**Ringo Starr** (left) has spoken about the final "new" **BEATLES** song which is being completed using AI. He told Variety, "I really worked at it just months ago here. And it works. It's a beautiful song. You know, for all the madness going on around it, it's still a beautiful track…"

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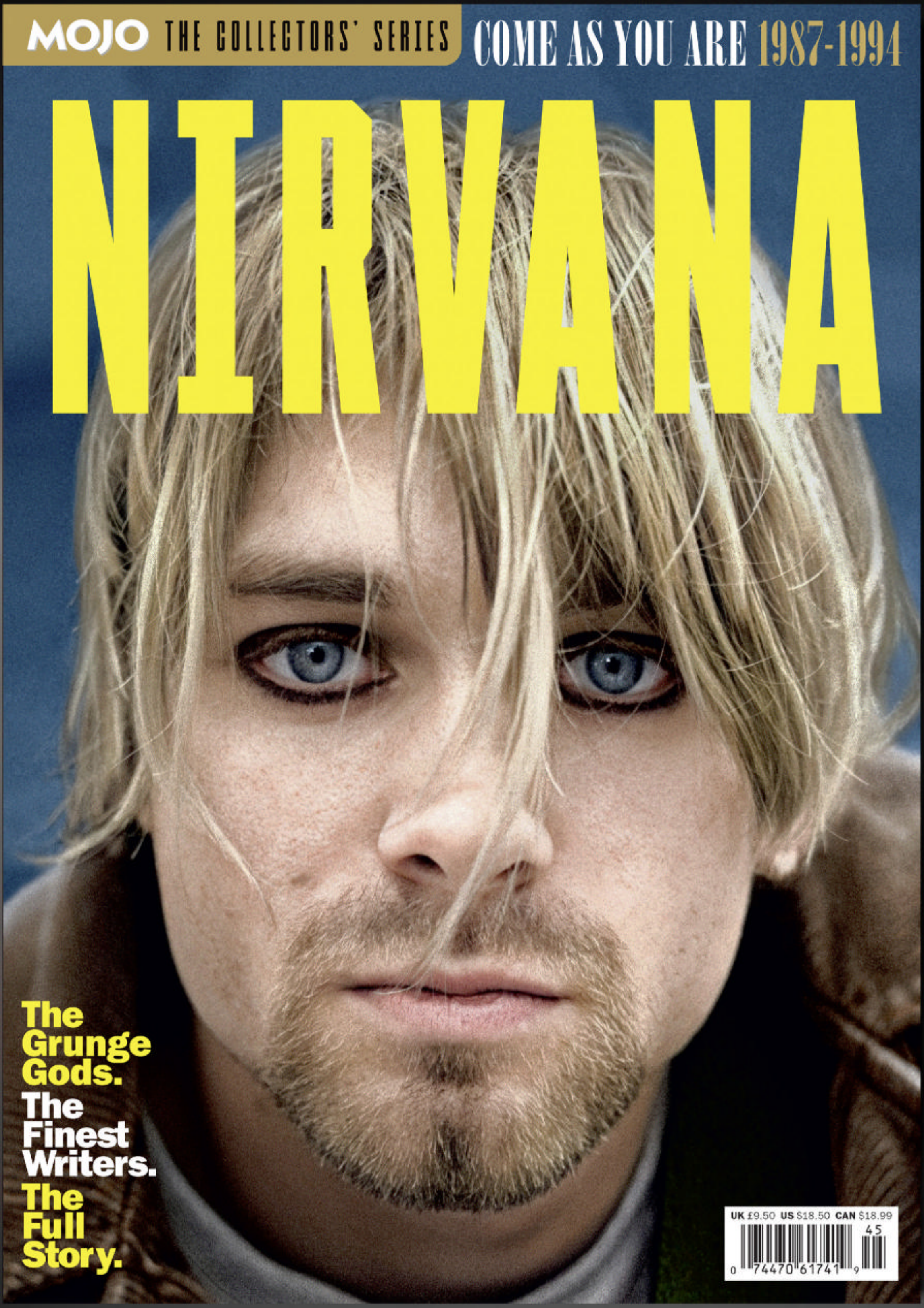
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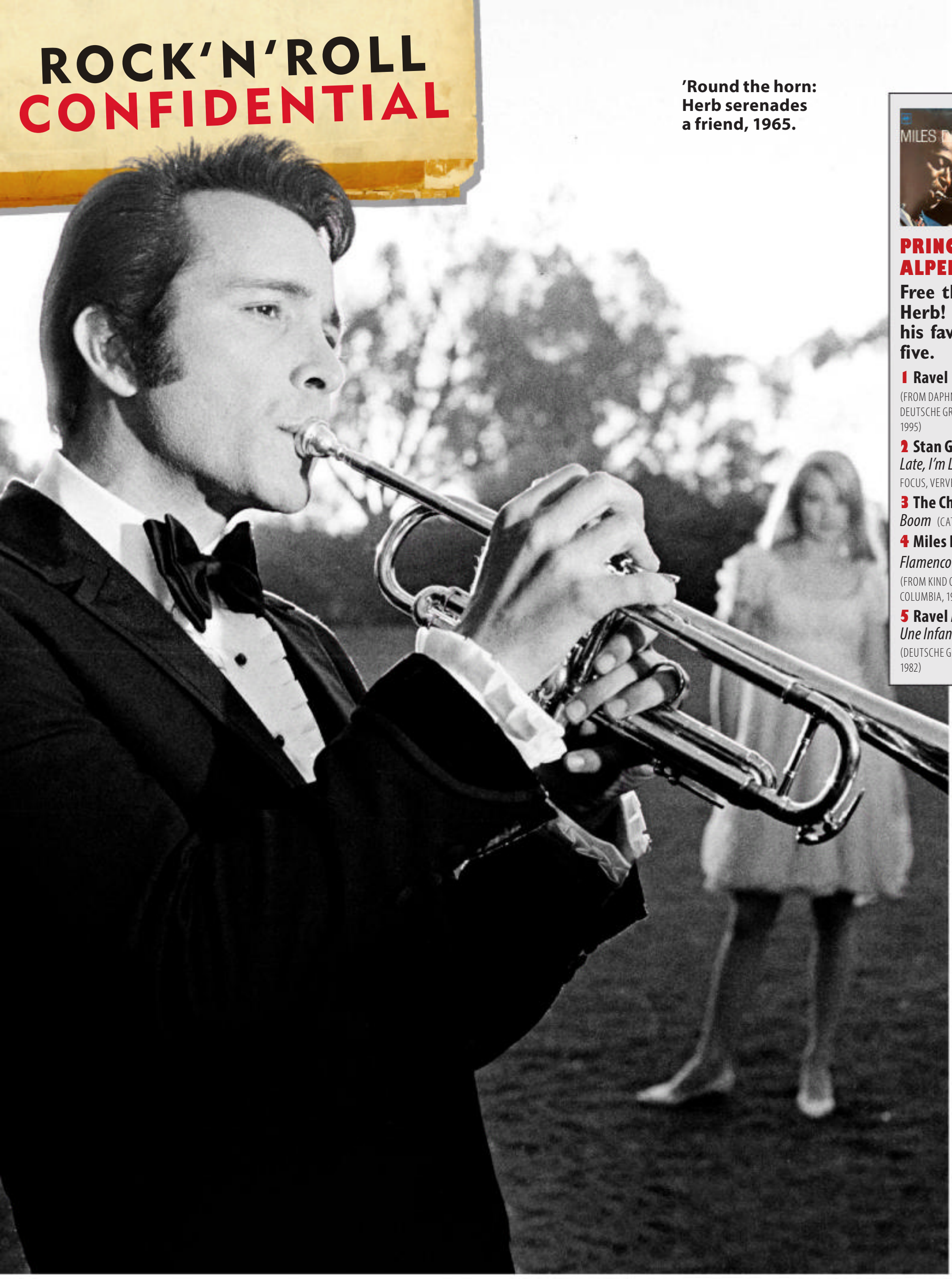

'Round the horn: Herb serenades a friend, 1965.

Getty

Herb Alpert

The A&M/Tijuana Brass guvnor talks the Carpenters, 'artists first' and being an introvert.

IT'S 9AM IN California, and Herb Alpert's taking a break from playing trumpet to take MOJO's call. Born in 1935 in Los Angeles, he began his professional life in 1957, writing songs for Sam Cooke, Jan & Dean and others. In 1962 he co-founded the storied A&M label, and the same year began a dizzying run of chart success with his Tijuana Brass, hitting US Number 1 as a vocalist with This Guy's In Love With You in '68. Accompanied by Lani Hall, his wife of 50 years, he's still gigging and recording, his embouchure as unmistakable as ever on next month's *Wish Upon A Star*, his forty-ninth LP. "I was at the right place at the right time," reflects Alpert, artist, philanthropist and true hipster, on his musical life. "Which is not to be overlooked."

You've been in this music game since the 1950s. What drives you?

I'm a card-carrying introvert, and I am totally submerged in the arts. I paint and sculpt professionally, and I love playing the trumpet. I've been playing it since I was eight years old. It gives me pleasure, it gives me strength, and when I do concerts, it gives me energy. So it's a win-win. You know, I really don't think about 'success'. I make records, and music for myself. It's all for my own gratification.

On the new album you do a bossa nova treatment of We've Only Just Begun by the Carpenters, one of A&M's greatest acts…

God bless the Carpenters, and God bless Karen Carpenter. I have a soft spot in my heart for them. I signed them in late 1969, and most of the people in my company thought, "Why did you sign these guys? They're a little light." When I gave them that song Close To You, I had Karen and Richard record it and I didn't like it. Karen was a great drummer, but she wasn't a recording drummer. So we had another take on it, with the Wrecking Crew, and that was the breakthrough record. Then people in my own company were like, "Hey man, that guy's a genius." Ha ha!

What was your intention with A&M?

I'd recorded for a major record company and I wasn't treated right. I filed it away in my brain that if I ever had my own record company, it would be 'artists first'. My partner Jerry Moss and I, we weren't thinking of how much money we could make, we were trying to find artists with something special to say, and to give them a chance in a space that was very creative.

You famously disbanded the Tijuana Brass in late 1969, after having an "out-of-body experience" in Munich…

I was selling a lot of records, I was rich and I was famous. And I wasn't happy. It's not about success, it's about inner happiness, that I didn't have. It took a while to find it.

What's the secret to artistic fulfilment?

Honesty is the whole key, putting that feeling into what you're doing. Here's an example. Sam Cooke had this one song and he thought it was really great. He showed me the lyric, and I was thinking, Man, this is so corny – 'Cokes are in the icebox' or something. I said, Sam, what does this song sound like? He picked up his guitar and started playing, and all of a sudden, this corny lyric turned into magic, a whole different thing. That was an 'a-ha!' for me – it said, it ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it.

Your friend and collaborator Julius Wechter's Baja Marimba Band were known for a mysterious urinating man on their record sleeves. What gave?

That was just to attract attention, kind of a fun thing to do. I also came up with [their ad slogan] 'Headed For Number Two', that took hold too! Julius Wechter was an extremely wonderful musician, he wrote one of the biggest songs I ever recorded with the Brass [Spanish Flea]. He was also on the record Rise that I did [a hit in 1979]. I remember listening to the playback, and I got goosebumps. Julius was looking out the window with his back to me. I said, Julius, what do you think of this one? He said, "I hate it." He hated it! Because it was like, four beats to the floor, he just couldn't handle it, because he was basically a jazz musician.

Tell us something you've never told an interviewer before.

You wanna know about my secret flames? Heheh! Well, I'm pretty open, you know, I would expose just about anything that has happened in my life [after a short pause, he plays, miraculously, the perky tune to '66 smash Spanish Flea on his trumpet]. *That's* how you get to Carnegie Hall, man.

As told to Ian Harrison

Wish Upon A Star is released on September 15 by Herb Alpert Presents.

"All of a sudden, this corny lyric turned into magic…"

HERB ALPERT

MILES DAVIS
Kind of Blue

PRINCE ALPERT

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2. **Stan Getz** *I'm Late, I'm Late* (FROM FOCUS, VERVE, 1962)
3. **The Chords** *Sh-Boom* (CAT, 1954)
4. **Miles Davis** *Flamenco Sketches* (FROM KIND OF BLUE, COLUMBIA, 1959)
5. **Ravel** *Pavane Pour Une Infante Défunte* (DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON, 1982)

LAST NIGHT A RECORD CHANGED MY LIFE

Alabaster DePlume

The free musician bows to Paul Robeson's Old Man River, on At Carnegie Hall (Vanguard, 1960).

I was an accompanist in Manchester, playing saxophone on other people's tunes. You meet with frustrations, about how people are running their sessions – Why do you care about that, and you don't care about this?!

It was on New Year's Eve, 2009 into 2010, in our flat in Fallowfield. Some friends had come from Bristol, from all different parts, to meet together. I already knew Paul Robeson through my parents, it's why I'm into the pentatonic melodies. But as the clock moved towards midnight, and we listened together to Paul Robeson singing Old Man River, I truly heard that song, and myself in relation to it, and what it is really doing, and I – we – realised that something deep must be set free.

He's just singing solo with a pianist – a world renowned bass concert singer whose life actually indeed was destroyed by McCarthyism. I think it's 'about' dignity and self-actualisation and acceptance of truth. It's quite philosophical – the river knows something that we don't. I don't know how to describe the *depth* of his voice, but I recognised this depth of truth, that people want to be brought together, want to be united, and I saw I could become my own artist.

After that I knew I didn't have to be an accompanist for other people. I started making my own record in 2010, immediately – I got extra shifts in the job I was doing to make music from a place of joy and love, though I never thought anyone would want to listen to my niche, soppy pentatonic things. It's one of those moments I saw as a catalyst. I recognised the bringing together of people, because that is what I'm working on: bringing different people together, and making people more strong, through the liberation of what is within.

As told to Ian Harrison

PAUL ROBESON
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PAUL RODGERS RETURNS! WITH HIS FIRST NEW LP FOR 24 YEARS...

"WHEN I LEFT Middlesbrough for the big, bad world I wanted three things," says former Free and Bad Company icon Paul Rodgers. "To survive, to find peace of mind, and to make great music."

As documented on *Midnight Rose*, Rodgers' first solo LP in 24 years, his late-onset equanimity has been hard-won, but 20 years in British Columbia with wife/manager/co-producer/former Miss Canada Cynthia has helped. "England used to feel like a pressure-cooker to me, everybody competing right up in your face," he says. "But here in the Okanagan Valley it's very laid-back, very green."

After 2018's *Free Spirit*, his live, 50th anniversary celebration of all things Free, lockdown "noodling" on acoustic guitar was Rodgers' route back to writing originals after acclaimed covers sets such as 2014 Stax tribute *The Royal Sessions*. Foils on the soulful, Bob Rock co-produced *Midnight Rose* include Rolling Stones pianist Chuck Leavell and musicians who've worked with Ringo Starr, Joe Walsh and Bryan Adams.

With his storied pipes still in fine fettle – "I've learned to relax and not take myself too seriously," he says of carrying that weight aged 73 – Rodgers expresses gratitude to Otis, Aretha and Ray Charles on Living It Up, counts his blessings on Dance In The Sun – and even hymns Cynthia's timorous rescue cat (named Cheryday) on Take Love.

Prestigiously, the new LP is released on the legendary, reactivated Sun Records. When publishing giant Primary Wave Music acquired a stake in Rodgers' back catalogue last year, they alerted him to Sun's likely interest in *Midnight Rose*, and he has since joined a roster which includes Suzi Quatro and old Mott The Hoople pal, Ian Hunter. "I can't say it's ambition fulfilled," say Rodgers of his Sun signing. "I would never have dared to dream so big! But Ian and I go back to when I used to see Mott play at the Sunderland Locarno, and it's wonderful to be part of something that's kind of fallen into my lap."

When Rodgers and Hunter met at Sun's 70th anniversary concert in Nashville last October, Rodgers apologised for poaching former Mott guitarist Mick Ralphs for Bad Company back in 1973. "Mick's still a very dear friend too," he adds, "but unfortunately he's having a hard time health-wise right now." There are no plans for new Bad Company music, then, but what of *Midnight Rose*? Will Rodgers tour his new LP? "Probably not," he smiles. "I don't get proper sleep or proper nutrition. Plus the hotels have noisy, sealed rooms that they spray with chemicals."

"Maybe it's because we don't tour too much that Paul still sings so well," opines Cynthia, who points out that *Midnight Rose*'s symbolic artwork features pictures of Paul Kossoff's guitar, Mick Ralphs' guitar, and a guitar that Paul gave to Brian May. "He's put his heart and soul into this album, so if it's to be his last one – what a beautiful finale."

James McNair

> **"Signing to Sun? I would never have dared to dream so big!"**
> **PAUL RODGERS**

Midnight Rose is released by Sun Records on September 22.

Victory Tischler-Blue, Ron Lyon, Chris Almeida

Mighty like a rose: (left) Paul Rodgers enjoying his life in the sun; (above) letting the pipes run free.

Making waves: Bush Tetras (from left) Laura Kennedy, Dee Pop, Pat Place, Cynthia Sley in 1980; (below) the re-formed Tetras (from left) Caitlin O'Riordan, Place, Steve Shelley and Sley today.

NYC NO-WAVERS BUSH TETRAS GROOVE ON

"WE WERE these dark weirdos, always standing out," says Bush Tetras' singer Cynthia Sley from her home in Queens, NY, assessing the confrontational DIY ensemble she spirited up alongside guitarist Pat Place on the turn-of-the-'80s no wave scene. "Three women up front, and we *weren't* the Go-Go's? We weren't even The Slits – we were even more androgynous."

Having left behind an occasional but all-killer discography across four decades, Bush Tetras recently highlighted their lasting excellence via 2021's *Rhythm And Paranoia* box set. Sley and Place now resurface with only their third LP proper, *They Live In My Head*, and an umpteenth line-up completed by ex-Sonic Youth drummer Steve Shelley, and, for an upcoming tour, bassist Caitlin 'Rocky' O'Riordan, formerly of The Pogues.

In the mid-'70s, Sley and Place converged on New York City to get amongst the CBGB's punk scene. From a Chicago art school background, Place initially co-founded James Chance's Contortions, contributing crazed slide-guitar to '79's *Buy*, but when that band fell apart, she brought its funk influences into the new group, with, on bass, her room-mate Laura Kennedy, who'd been at art college with Sley in Cleveland.

With Contortions obsessive Dee Pop (real name: Dimitri Papadopoulos) on drums, Bush Tetras soon packed CBGB's, then started a residency at new club Tier 3 ("run by a woman," notes Place pointedly, from her Long Island home), and dropped ace single Too Many Creeps, about the unsolicited street hassle they'd experience around their rehearsal space on the pre-gentrification Lower East Side.

"We'd hear rumours of guys in other bands saying, 'What the hell are they doing?'" recalls Place with an unconcerned chuckle. "Honestly, we couldn't have answered that question. We didn't really know how to play our instruments, and there was a beauty in that."

Bush Tetras connected transatlantically, released singles with deviant UK indie Fetish and, after supporting The Clash at three shows in spring '81's legendary 17-night run at Bond's, had sticksman Topper Headon produce them. Thanks to their manager/booking agent, however, they "ended up touring too much," says Sley, "with no time to write." Place adds: "we were seriously partying, too. It was burn-out!"

Thus in '83 they imploded, but within four years played their first reunion show. A grunge-era incarnation finally spawned a debut LP, 1997's *Beauty Lies*; a follow-up was recorded but shelved until 2012. "If you get big-money success, it only splits up the band," says Place, "whereas Cynthia and I have remained really good friends."

When Dee Pop passed away a month before *Rhythm And Paranoia*'s release, Shelley substituted, "as an equal collaborator", and *They Live In My Head* came together as infectious light relief between New York's stringent Covid lockdowns. "It's so freeing, doing this in your sixties," Sley concludes. "Pat and I made this pledge: if it's not fun, we're not doing it."

"Yeah," agrees Place, "the pressure's off. You know – to prove *what*?"

Andrew Perry

They Live In My Head is out now on Wharf Cat.

> "We didn't know how to play… there was a beauty in that."
> **PAT PLACE**

BUSH CHEMISTRY

Three Tetra long-form classics

Bush Tetras
Boom In The Night: Original Studio Recordings 1980-1983
(ROIR USA, 1995)

Their spirited post-punk singles, anthologised. Key tunes include the male-attention-refusing Too Many Creeps (see also: MOJO 246 covermount, *Death Disco*), quintessential punk funk anthem You Can't Be Funky, and incendiary groove Das Ah Riot.

Bush Tetras
Beauty Lies
(TIM/KERR, 1997)

Their Nona Hendryx-produced LP debut, which vanished amid corporate reshuffling in the dying days of grunge. There's definitely something Courtney Love about Cynthia Sley's raw-throated howl on Page 18, but otherwise the original quartet's idiosyncratic twisty-turny schtick shines through.

Bush Tetras
They Live In My Head
(WHARF CAT, 2023)

Forty-three years in, their most coherent and best album. Place's edgy riffing stirringly evokes Gang Of Four's Andy Gill, while Sley transcends Covid-era misery with hilarious Franglais tune Tout Est Meilleur (Avec Du Beurre), and on 2020 Vision castigates man-splaining in a persuasive call-to-insurrection.

Getty

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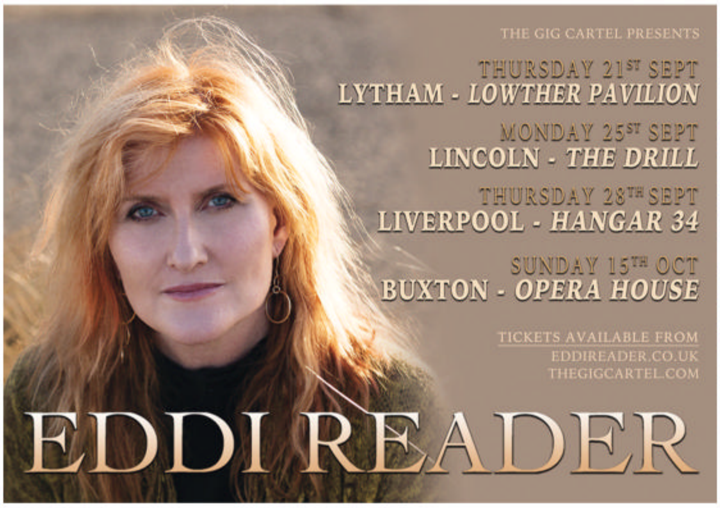

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..... HARD TO BEAT

"I like to think I can still block a punch."
WILLIE J HEALEY

Free Willie: the gloves are off for Healey.

PLASTIC SOUL REVIVALIST WILLIE J HEALEY GETS BACK IN THE RING

SAT OUTSIDE Madrid's Palacio de Deportes de la Comunidad before an Arctic Monkeys support slot, Willie J Healey is weighing up any pre-show nerves he might have, compared with what he experienced as an amateur boxer.

"Before a gig I get a bit pacey, but the level of fear I used to get before going in a boxing ring is incomparable," Healey reflects, a slight kink in the bridge of his nose the only visible clue to his old occupation. "A show would have to go pretty badly for someone to try and knock me out. They'd have to catch me, too. I like to think I can still block a punch."

Healey's third album, *Bunny*, is a sumptuous mélange of soft-focus AOR melodies and '70s soul. Following the scuffed alt-rock of 2017 debut *People And Their Dogs* and the lush, George Harrison-meets-Harry Nilsson songwriting of 2020's *Twin Heavy*, it finds Healey and producer/engineer Loren Humphrey (whose credits include work on Arctic Monkeys' *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* and Lana Del Rey's *Norman Fucking Rockwell!*) dressing up the singer's winsome songs in gloopy funk grooves, Philly soul and disco sparkles.

While recording in New York, Healey and Humphrey drew on touchstones by Sly And The Family Stone, Barry White, Bobby Charles, Lou Reed (check the *Coney Island Baby*-like guitar lines in opener Woke Up Smiling) and David Bowie's plastic soul prototype, *The Gouster*, to create the record's warm, analogue ambience. "*The Gouster* was a big one," Healey says. "I'd never heard those mixes of Bowie's songs before and it blew me away. I'm not Sly Stone, I'm not a soul singer, so I have to be careful about appropriating these things. But hearing Bowie make it his own immediately pointed out the right direction for me."

Twenty-nine-year-old Healey has already done his fair share of Bowie-like skin-shedding. Born in the Oxfordshire town of Carterton, he was a shy and sensitive child before he began training in his uncle's boxing gym when he was 10. "I had zero confidence," he recalls.

A promising teenage fighter with aims to go pro, Healey began playing and making music in secret while taking part in bouts across the country, afraid his friends and peers would laugh at him. It was only when he saw Jarvis Cocker on TV talking about his own sense of imposter syndrome that he decided to hang up his gloves at 18 and try his hand at music full-time.

He credits the sport with giving him the mettle to carry on after Columbia dropped him shortly after the release of *People And Their Dogs*: "In boxing I used to lose all the time, so I learned from quite a young age how to keep plugging away," he says. "Getting dropped by a major label was horrible, but you can let that be your story or you can dust yourself off and carry on."

Healey's vocational pivot has clearly paid off. Before he heads inside to soundcheck, we wonder how his family reacted to him quitting boxing to become a singer. "I was really, really worried about telling my dad," Healey remembers. "But he was like, 'Oh thank God! I don't have to drive around the country watching you get punched in the head any more.'"

Chris Catchpole

Willie J Healey's Bunny is out August 25 on Yala! Records.

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Harry Nilsson, Lou Reed, Sly And The Family Stone, Joe Jackson
- Recent single Thank You was initially written to thank Jamie T for lending Healey a vintage Roland drum machine. "I wrote the song almost as a joke, but he loved it and added a verse," says Healey. "I hoped he'd let me keep the drum machine, but he wanted it back."
- Healey currently lives in Bristol, where he enjoys going on long bike rides with Idles frontman Joe Talbot.
- Boxing isn't the only career Healey can fall back on. He's also worked as a plasterer and a greengrocer.

KEY TRACKS

- Subterraneans
- Fashun
- Thank You

Hollie Fernando

NEW YORK REPROBATES PRISON BREAK OUT OF THE ENDLESS BOOGIE!

PAUL MAJOR, singer/guitarist with New York underground supergroup Prison, first acquired the taste for wild, improvisational rock as a teen in the late 1960s, escaping an "extremely oppressive" upbringing via his local record store. "I'd read a Life magazine story on LSD with this dude who was tripping and thinking he was an orange. I thought, I wanna think I'm an orange, too! But I couldn't get hold of any acid, so I'd search for records made by people who were obviously tripping, hoping some of it would rub off on me. Any album with a track over 10 minutes titled something like Going Through The Wall With Your Brain Unplugged was a must-have."

> "I wanna think I'm an orange, too!"
> **PAUL MAJOR**

Decades later, Major founded Endless Boogie, infamous for their own 10-minutes-plus psychedelic bangers. But Major's latest project, Prison, takes the concept to its acid-fried conclusion. "With Endless Boogie, the song would go on for a coupla minutes, and then it would go free," Major explains. "But what's beautiful about Prison is we're 100 per cent free from the start." Everything – from riffs to lyrics to freak-outs – is improvised; bringing preconceived song ideas into the space is strictly verboten. "The jams evolve, and the songs create themselves," adds Major, almost giddy at the thought.

Prison began in 2016 as a weekly after-hours jam between Sarim Al-Rawi (ex-Liquor Store) and DIY show promoter Matt Lilly. But as tapes of their caveman freak-outs circulated among the noise-rock coterie centred around Lower East Side hang-out Max Fish, the guestlist swelled. Every Tuesday, the likes of Major, Love As Laughter's Sam Jayne, The Mighty Flashlight's Mike Fellows, Sic Alps' Mike Donovan – and even, one night, a horn section – would cram into a basement belonging to Al-Rawi's friend, the 80-something lawyer for Sirhan Sirhan, murderer of Robert F Kennedy.

Their surroundings were hardly salubrious – "There's graffiti from the 1950s on the walls and the bathroom is a five-gallon bucket of piss," Al-Rawi says – but haywire magic occurred within its environs. Following several successful gigs, the collective travelled to upstate New York in November 2019 to capture their improvisations in a proper studio. Before they could share these jams with the world, however, Covid threw Prison into solitary confinement.

Then, in December 2020, Sam Jayne died of an undiagnosed heart condition. The loss is still keenly felt. "Sam was a chaotic genius – give him any musical instrument and he could pull something amazing out of it," says Al-Rawi. "He was a wildman, creatively unstoppable," adds Lilly. "His mom told me, when he was seven he asked her, 'Does everyone else have music playing in their head the whole time, or is it just me?' Music was just pouring out of him."

But now, four years on, Prison's debut album *Upstate* is finally up for release. Is its agreeably cacophonic suite of 20-minute jams the psychedelic freak-out of 13-year-old Paul Major's dreams? "I certainly feel psychedelic when we're playing," Major grins. "We're totally in the moment – no past, no future. It gooses me up, for sure."

Stevie Chick

Prison's Upstate is released by Drag City on August 25.

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Endless Boogie, Royal Trux, Flipper
- The group taped their early sessions on Al-Rawi's videocamera, as it had a great microphone. "We'd record over thrift-store VHS tapes. It was a good day when we found a copy of Gandhi – that movie is so long we recorded four hours of jams over it."
- A second album, recorded just before lockdown, waits in the wings. "It's closer to our earliest sessions," says Lilly. "We taped for hours, and every hour or so another surprise guest would join the fray. There was a dozen of us playing by the end of it."

KEY TRACKS

- Low Hangin' Disco Ball/So Alone
- I Always Get What I Want/Playin' Pool With The Planets

Jailhouse rock: (from left) Paul Major, the late Sam Jayne, Sarim Al-Rawi and Matt Lilly on wash day.

Saram Al-Rawi, Getty

MOJO PLAYLIST

This month's eco-punk, jazz-folk and blues for Mammon.

1 ROGER WATERS MONEY

From the re-recorded *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, a bone-dry blues version, with Waters as Satan offering you the world's riches in return for your soul.
Find it: *YouTube*

2 MODERN NATURE MURMURATION

Open spaces, jazz/folk improvisations, avant-classical ambience; Jack Cooper's unit reimagine Talk Talk under the Stansted flightpath.
Find it: *YouTube*

3 LOL TOLHUST X BUDGIE X JACKNIFE LEE LOS ANGELES (FT. JAMES MURPHY)

The Cure/Banshees drum battalion bring glam bounce with fangs, as LCD man Murphy stares into the American abyss.
Find it: *streaming services*

4 DOLLY PARTON WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS/WE WILL ROCK YOU

Rousing Olympic mash-up for Paris 2024. The video's proof that Dolly is bigger than La Tour Eiffel, even sat down.
Find it: *YouTube*

5 THE SOUP DRAGONS & FRED SCHNEIDER NO MUSIC ON A DEAD PLANET

Bellshill's reunited indie-baggyists bring electro-punk eco-splatter. B-52 Fred's satirical-watusi persona comes fleetingly through.
Find it: *streaming services*

6 LAURA MISCH HIDE TO SEEK

Bucolic positivity from the London sax-electronicist's debut. In the video she plays suspended over a field – Baggy Trousers for the new psychedelic age.
Find it: *YouTube*

7 MICKO AND THE MELLOTRONICS (WHAT'S IN A) NAME

Kevin Eldon co-sings and Horace Panter plays bass on this post-punk-via-Br*tp*p muttered threat from the ex-Bowling Green brain.
Find it: *streaming services*

8 MATT DEIGHTON A SONG THAT'S ON MY MIND

The Mother Earth/Oasis man dwells in '72, with a starry-eyed rocker of forgiven sins and feeling good, matured in an oaken cask.
Find it: *streaming services*

9 GRATEFUL DEAD EYES OF THE WORLD (DEMO)

A canonical Dead jam in embryo, as Jerry Garcia employs acoustic guitar, rinky-dink keyboards and his most soulful voice to accidentally invent hypnagogic bedroom pop in 1973.
Find it: *YouTube*

10 ASTRAL DIFFICULTIES LOST MAP PRESENTS WEIRD WAVE

Vigorous kosmische vibes from the Isle Of Eigg herald a new project from the Pictish Trail/Lost Map label's Johnny Lynch and pals.
Find it: *streaming services*

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KEEPS ON RUNNING

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Ramblers & Gamblers

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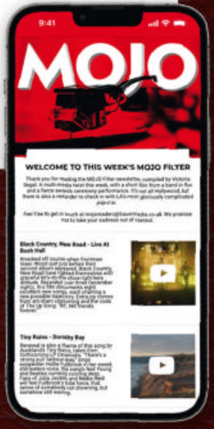

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THE MOJO INTERVIEW

The **sonic pathfinder** for **Bolan** and **Bowie** (but also **Morrissey** and **Mary Hopkin**) straddles glam and folk and prog and pop and is **still twiddling knobs** as he closes in on his eighties. **"It's been an emotional rollercoaster,"** sighs **Tony Visconti**.

Interview by **JIM IRVIN** • Portrait by **GRAMAIN VINCENT**

MEET ANTHONY EDWARD VISCONTI, A rock'n'roll fan raised in a poor Italian district of Brooklyn, who learned guitar and, in his teens, managed to make a living playing double bass for Jewish holiday-makers in the Catskill resorts. The jazzman's life meant brushes with heroin, which he eventually resisted, but he avoided being drafted into the US army by making sure there were opiates in his system on the day of the medical, and thus being rejected as a junkie.

Attracted to hippydom, he married singing girlfriend Siegrid Berman when they were both 21, and they enjoyed taking acid trips together every weekend. Their folk duo failed to connect but led to Visconti becoming in-house producer for a New York publishing company and, subsequently, the arranger for busy pop producer Denny Cordell (Move, Moody Blues, Procol Harum) in London in the summer of 1967.

At first, he found daily life in London – home of bewildering un-gridded streets, inedible food, mouldy, shilling-in-the-meter flats with no showers, 240 pennies to the pound and people who said incomprehensible things like 'chuffed' and 'knackered' – to be anything but swinging. But its pop life was another matter. There was exciting music everywhere.

Having discovered a taste for a scotch egg chased with half a bitter (despite being a vegetarian), that was the meal he bolted before going to catch fellow hippies Tyrannosaurus Rex play a Middle Earth Club night on Tottenham Court Road. Feeling the hairs on his arms stiffen, he realised he wanted to work with this corkscrew-haired elf and his bongo-banging wingman. Visconti's records with Marc Bolan would make both their names, until Visconti began to feel taken for granted and resigned in anger. A very close relationship with David Bowie would also sputter out. Twice. But each time rebound and grow stronger. They'd make 11 celebrated, wildly different records together, from 1969 until 2016. When Bowie wanted his final statement, *Blackstar*, to sound like nothing he'd ever done before, he asked Visconti to produce it.

As Visconti took charge of his first production in London in 1967 – Daughter Of Love, a forgotten single for Indian artist Biddu – he could not have known he'd still be doing the job over 50 years later, producing over 125 albums and dozens of stand-alone tracks for artists from Thin Lizzy to Elaine Page, The Damned to Angélique Kidjo, Gentle Giant to Gay Dad, Sparks, Boomtown Rats, Junior's Eyes, Altered Images, Morrissey… The list goes on and on.

Now Demon Records have compiled a 4-CD/6-LP collection of highlights from this illustrious six-decade career, *Produced By Tony Visconti*, a colourful parade of those disparate acts, linked only by the subtle skills of the Brooklyn boy who learned how to score for strings and wanted to know, more than anything else, how the Brits made pop records that got in his head. His quest for an answer ➢

WE'RE NOT WORTHY

Paul Simonon on the Zen sheriff of the knobs.

"It always feels like Tony is part of the band he's working with, and he has a way of allowing what you do to sing out. For *Merrie Land* [by The Good, The Bad & The Queen], he was like the sheriff – we let him pick the songs. His approach is very pure, very Zen, and it helps me that he's a bass player, too."

Gramain Vincent/ABACA/Shutterstock, Tom Oldham

< has kept him busy longer than any other producer of his generation.

Faced with this treasury of a life's work… how does it feel?

Well, it's an eerie feeling. Music is a way to recall things you've totally blocked or forgotten. Play something you heard in your youth and maybe you'll remember the time you scraped your knee in the schoolyard. You wouldn't normally have these memories floating up to the surface. So hearing my musical past has been an emotional rollercoaster.

How vivid are the pictures? Can you suddenly see that studio where you made Smokey Pokey World with The Tickle, for example?

Yes. I can. Advision, a small studio on New Bond Street in a cellar. The engineer was Gerald Chevin, an electronic whiz kid who built the console. My mentor Denny Cordell started using it, he recorded The Move there. That was the first place I started recording my own productions.

I can't think of any other pop or rock producer who's worked consistently for as long as you have.

Fifty-plus years. Yeah. Retirement is unthinkable. I worked recently with Damon Albarn, Perry Farrell, The Damned. And just made an album with Paul Simonon and Galen Ayers. Such a thrill. I have to really love the music. Everyone you see in this box, I had a love affair with their music. They were worth working night and day for.

You turned 16 in 1960, so you've lived through the entire history of pop. What made you want to get involved?

Before The Beatles… Chuck Berry. Mickey & Sylvia, I loved their records. I used to go to the rock'n'roll shows that Alan Freed and Murray The K put on during the holidays at the Brooklyn Paramount. Twenty different acts in a two-hour show. Five shows a day. As a 12-year-old kid, I would get up at the crack of dawn to make the first show, which was like nine o'clock in the morning. Then hide in a bathroom stall and creep out when the next show started. To see those people – Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Buddy Holly, or the guitarist of the Moonglows [Billy Johnson] – in person was a drop dead experience. My heart was pounding in my chest. There was one amplifier in the middle of the stage, which all the guitarists shared, and had a long lead that went behind the curtains. Alan Freed would come out and before he'd introduce the next act, you'd hear somebody plugging a guitar into this amp. And I'm biting my nails. Who is it gonna be? Buddy Holly? Chuck Berry? So exciting.

When rock'n'roll started to be played on the radio it was only like half an hour a week. My dad had a tape recorder and I would record it. And I thought, This is my music. It's wild. It's sexy. It's unpredictable. Guitars. I mean, by today's standards you wouldn't say this, but guitars in those days seemed *loud*. And Chuck Berry had distortion. I was raised on a very clean sound like Les Paul, who was my idol, so this sound felt new, like it belonged to my generation. When we first saw The Beatles, they were my age. I'm the same age as George Harrison. So we all went through the same thing.

How aware of sound were you as a kid? Did you wonder how records were made?

Absolutely. I couldn't figure out how they got the reverb on those records. What do they know that I don't know? We lived on the top floor of our building and we had a long staircase which was hardly used. I put a microphone at the top of the staircase which recorded my guitar and voice, and another microphone at the bottom catching the reverb. I cracked it just out of reasoning. There were no technical books. And it was a very secretive world, the recording world. I had my first recording session when I was 13 years old. A guy called Jay Fishman discovered me and a friend singing in a church hall. We were imitating The Everly Brothers. He called us The Taylor Kids and we made a couple of records with him. That was my first time in the studio and it was paradise. But I could not go into the control room, that was forbidden territory. They had absolutely nothing in there then, of course. About five knobs on the desk.

Did you want to be that guy behind the glass?

What I really wanted to do was to overdub like Les Paul. I knew what he was doing. He started out dubbing acetate to acetate, then mono to mono tape recorders, and then he said that was too frustrating so he asked Ampex, the tape recorder manufacturers, to make him an 8-track recorder. For at least five years he had the only 8-track tape recorder in the world! They thought he was insane: "Who needs eight tracks?!"

I'd always wanted to meet him and [in the late '90s] I was on the board of NARAS, the Grammy organisation. So I was blessed to see him at one of the events they were having. He was up on a podium signing autographs. I hadn't met him yet, so I got in the queue. At last, it was my turn and I said, "Les Paul, I've got to thank you for all…" and he said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Next!" He was so rude to me! (*laughs*) But I managed to have a nice conversation about recording with him a year or so later.

How did you get your first musical job?

My first wife Siegrid and I were a duo, we were doing gigs and were spotted by a talent scout who took us to the Richmond Organisation to meet [publisher] Howard Richmond. We started making demos. And he called me into his office one day and said, "Tony, I gotta tell you something. I don't like your songs." My heart sank and I thought, That's it, I'm out of the music business… And then he said, "But I like your demos! I'm gonna give you a little studio in here so you can make demos with our artists and we'll see where it goes from there." Well, that

A LIFE IN PICTURES

Brooklyn Boy: Visconti through the ages.

1 Tony the cowboy kid: "I was five years old in that picture," says Visconti. "I got my first ukulele that year and learned to play it quickly."

2 Hot love: Tony & Siegrid, husband and wife singing duo, 1965.

3 Those were the days: Mary Hopkin with husband Visconti, 1971.

4 One more for the kids: T. Rex enjoy dinner made by Tony's mother in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, April 1971 (from left) Marc Bolan, Bill Legend, Mickey Finn, Josephine Visconti, Tony's girlfriend Liz Hartley, Steve Currie.

5 Diamond dogs reunion: Visconti and David Bowie at Record Plant, New York, during the making of *Lodger*, 1979.

6 Work-life balance: Visconti with May Pang on their wedding day, February 25, 1989.

7 Selling the world: Visconti with erstwhile Spider From Mars and Holy Holy bandmate Woody Woodmansey at the David Bowie tribute concert, New York, April 1, 2016.

8 Making dreams come true: Tony is honoured by the Music Producers Guild, 2011.

9 Hype Man cometh: Tony Visconti in the David Bowie Band, 1970.

Courtesy Tony Visconti (3), Getty (3), Avalon, Alamy, Shutterstock

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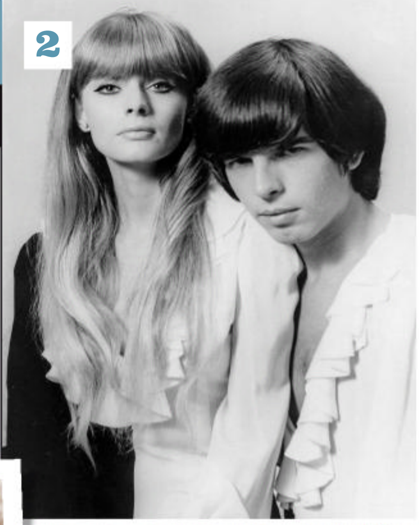
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was great. I'd not been doing that for very long, maybe a couple of months, and I'm having a break one day and I go to the water cooler and there's Denny Cordell, fresh from England. He worked with our sister company, Essex Music. I was fascinated by him because I'd met only one person from England before. His accent was so posh and he was a handsome guy, I idolised him immediately. He said, "What do you do here?", and I tell him I'm the house producer and he says, "Well then you're my American cousin." We got on like a house on fire.

He loved R&B and soul and he'd come to America specifically to re-record a Georgie Fame track. He didn't like the version he'd done [with British musicians]. He said, "I'm going to record at A&R Studios in an hour," which was Phil Ramone's studio. I said, Oh, that's exciting. Who's playing for you? He says, "Brooks Arthur is playing bass and Clark Terry on trumpet." I'm going, Oh, my God! Can I see the charts? He goes, "What do you mean by 'charts'?" The arrangements, where's the arrangements? He says, "I don't have any." What do you do in England? "Well, we book the musicians, we have the studio booked all day. And we get there, light a few spliffs, listen to the demo and then kind of jam until we get the song."

I said, You do that with Clark Terry you're gonna get crucified by session fees, triple overtime, and if he puts pencil to paper he'll get an arranger's fee on top… Denny paled and said, "What can I do?" And I said, Play me the demo, I can write out the chords, and I wrote out a lead sheet indicating the drum fills and bass line. And we had a new thing called a Xerox machine, so I quickly made some copies and went with him to the session, handed them out to Brooks Arthur and Clark Terry, and before the tape rolled, they were already playing the tune off the paper, and at that moment, Denny turned to me with sheer admiration. Nothing went that quickly in the UK, and I'd saved him a whole bunch of money. He went back to Britain and about two weeks later I got a phone call that sounded like it was underwater, asking me to come over and work with him. About a week later I arrived in London, the end of April 1967, just after my 23rd birthday.

> "You'd hear somebody **plugging a guitar into this amp.** And I'm biting my nails. Who is it gonna be? **Buddy Holly? Chuck Berry?"**

The Beatles were just about to release *Sgt. Pepper*…

Yes. I was staying in Denny's flat for the first few nights. He knew a guy called Simon Miller-Mundy who worked at EMI, who sneaked out a white label of *Sgt. Pepper* under his coat and came to Denny's house. We put it on and I heard the opening and said to myself, You just died and went to heaven. I'd been here three days and I already felt close to my goal: I wanted to work with The Beatles someday.

Many producers have a signature sound, but listening to the music in this box, you never have, except perhaps for your use of strings.

Is there an aesthetic thread running through your work?

Well, my mission statement, if you like, is I want to make the artist's dreams come true. I don't want to give them the Visconti sound, I want you to hear *their* sound, Clare Grogan, The Photos, Gentle Giant, whoever. I want you to hear the best they can do. And I try to draw the best from them, technically, musically and artistically. A lot of producers put their stinky sound all over a record and the artist doesn't want to work with them again. *My* dream is to be a better producer. I want to outdo the last time I was in the studio. I still want to get better and better at what I do.

Do you effectively join the band for a while?

Yes, George Martin, fifth Beatle. You join the band, get into their heads, see what they're excellent at and make sure it goes down on tape the way they want it to be heard.

How much of a psychologist do you have to be?

You have to understand the way people think and feel. In Brooklyn, if you said the wrong thing to somebody, you'd be in a fist-fight immediately. Street diplomacy. I learned to be respectful and sensitive to people's feelings.

You worked with a lot of folk artists initially. When you first discovered Tyrannosaurus Rex, they were effectively a folk act, weren't they?

Yes, and part of that was economy. I wasn't going to get the budget to take a whole band and do an album. But I could take two people. I basically recorded their live act in two days, one day for recording, one for overdubs and mixing.

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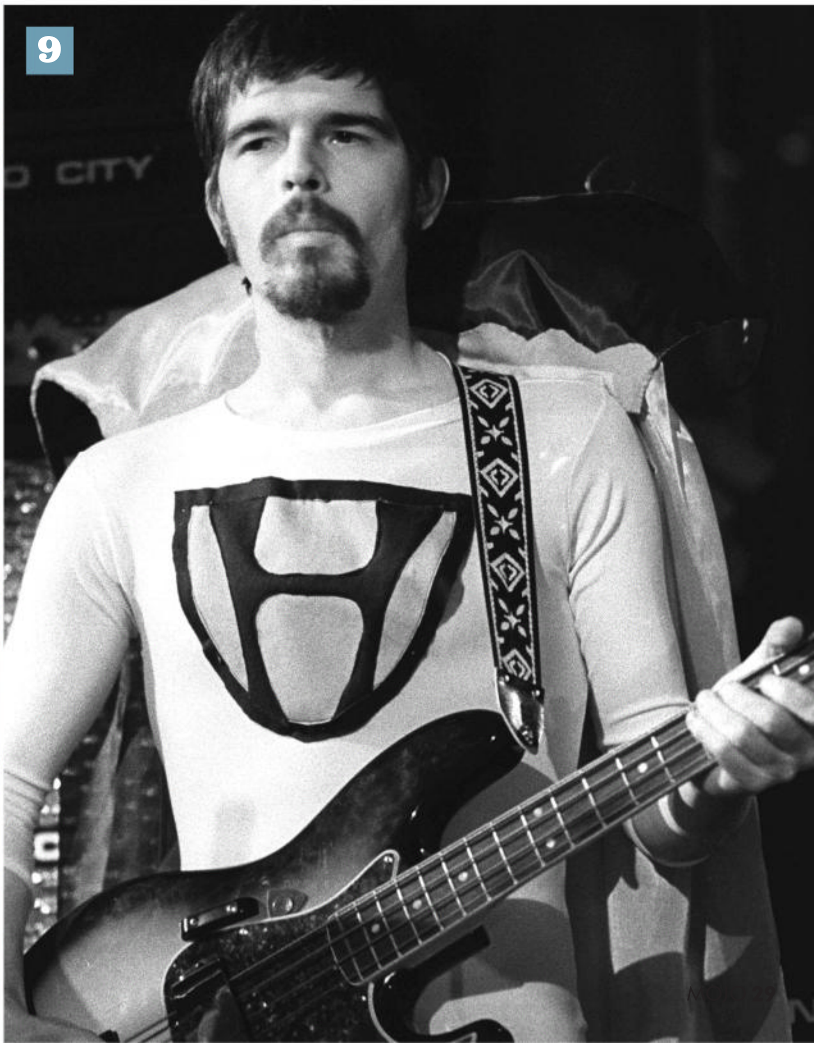
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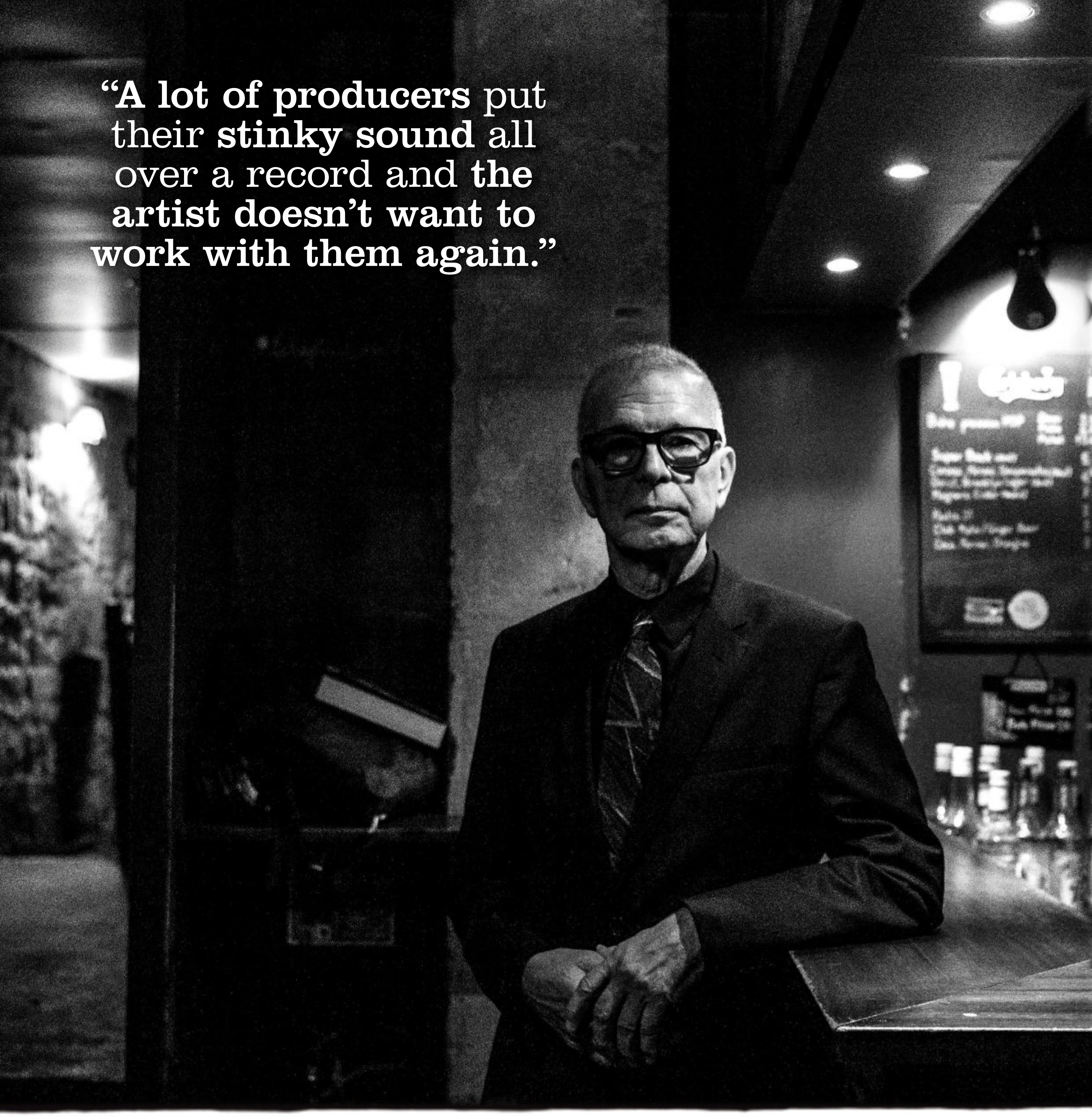
“A lot of **producers** put their **stinky sound** all over a record and **the artist doesn’t want to work with them again.”**



Christophe Archambault/AFP/Getty

Bowie was also small-scale when you started working with him.

Again, it was an economical thing. He could get gigs in a folk club with a 12-string guitar. He couldn’t afford to put a band together. Until I came along. I played bass, and I moved in with him and eventually we attracted John Cambridge and Mick Ronson and we became The Hype. His label wasn’t really friendly, even after Space Oddity, which was a massive hit. David wanted to tour with us, but there was no money to support us. So Angie [Bowie], who was very entrepreneurial, went to the label and said, “I want you to sign up The Hype. We’re gonna make a great record for you.” The guy said, “OK,” and we never made the record. We just used the advance to buy amps and drums.

Bolan and Bowie were friendly rivals. Was there any sense of crossing the floor when you worked with both of them?

I was working with both of them at the same time, loving them equally, doing my best for each of them. Then David had the first big hit. Marc saw it more as rivalry. David loved Marc, and was always kind to him. Marc was occasionally very catty and snipey. But it got better when he became more successful and they were on more equal terms.

You’d turned down the chance to produce Space Oddity, so your first big hit was T. Rex’s Ride A White Swan in 1970…

Yeah, the day my life changed, when that went to Number 2.

Was that record influenced by Spirit In The Sky, which came out earlier that year? Similar groove, that implicit drone thing…

I see what you mean, but no, I don’t think so. All Marc’s music was very basic ’50s and ’60s rock’n’roll.

Bolan was a great pop star but soon people started saying he was 50 per cent talent, 50 per cent bullshit self-mythologising…

He was a poet. And a product of his own creation. He grew up on the streets of Hackney, but he had a beautiful accent, he was eloquent and articulate. He literally invented this person who wasn’t Marc Feld but Marc Bolan. He was two people in the same body. I met him when he was very humble, just a little bit of arrogance, which I knew was gonna grow…

He was clearly smart, so why wasn’t he smart enough to read the room once he became a star?

Musically, he was limited. With his seven chords… I counted them. Whereas David, he could sit at a piano and play all kinds of jazz chords. All his early stuff showed that he was musically very interesting.

"I still want to get better at what I do": Tony Visconti in Paris, preparing to mix up another classic.

And Bowie immediately killed off Ziggy Stardust, his teenybop persona…

Yes. Whereas Marc had a big hit with *Electric Warrior* and repeated the formula again and again.

Did you not have any influence? Could you not drive some change?

Well, I couldn't get him to go beyond what he was capable of musically. I used to say to him, Marc, you've got money in the bank now, take a year off and learn some new chords, invent something. And he said, "No, I gotta do one more for the kids." He was afraid to lose his young audience. And that's how he jumped into *The Slider* and *Tanx* and *Zinc Alloy*…: "One more for the kids." He didn't want to grow musically, but I could put my arrangements on top of his simplicity. He gave me complete free rein when it was time to overdub instruments.

Did it feel strange when, after having worked so closely with Bowie on two albums, he had his breakthrough without you?

Hunky Dory is my favourite Bowie album. And then when he invented Ziggy, I went, Oh, this is fucking incredible. It's not a David Bowie album. It's a Ziggy Stardust album! No one had done that before.

You'd fallen out over [Bowie's manager] Tony Defries, right?

Yeah, I said, I can't stand Defries, he's an awful man. And David was loyal to him at that point. Tony got him the big money deal with RCA whereas [Bowie's previous manager] Ken Pitt had done nothing, thought he should be in British musicals…

How were you brought back into the fold?

It was *Diamond Dogs*. David was trying to produce himself for the first time, and he got lost. And he phoned me up. "Tony, I'm making this album. I've tried mixing all over town. But I'm not getting any mixes that I like." And I had *just* built my home studio in Shepherd's Bush. I think I was the first producer in this country to have a proper 16-track home studio, at this house in Melrose Terrace. The ground floor was entirely studio and in the basement were my echo plates.

David comes round and I had no studio furniture yet, just a carpenter's sawhorse. So we sat on that and I mixed the first track and he called me at, like, three in the morning and said, "It sounds fantastic."

THE TONY AWARDS

Three overlooked gems from **Visconti's** jewel-box…

THE FOLK-ROCK EPIC

Mary Hopkin

★★★★★

Earth Song/Ocean Song

(APPLE, 1971)

Apple's first chart-topping act hated being a pop star and refused to play live, but when she met (and later married) Tony Visconti they made this chamber-folk classic together, with an all-star cast (Danny Thompson, Dave Cousins, Ralph McTell), and Visconti's lyrical, occasionally psychedelic string quartet framing Hopkin's nonpareil voice.

THE SPACED ODDITY

Carmen

★★★★

Fandangos In Space

(REGAL ZONOPHONE, 1973)

Deliciously preposterous Anglo-American flamenco rock, on the label EMI revived especially to showcase Denny Cordell and Tony Visconti productions. Castanets, claps and zapateado combine with tricky prog arrangements, huge synths and operatic four-part harmony. Like Queen and Rush scoring a bullfight. "The world wasn't ready for them," sighs Visconti. Bowie invited them onto The 1980 Floor Show.

THE BRUM DO

The Steve Gibbons Band

★★★★

Down In The Bunker

(POLYDOR, 1978)

The Brummie pub rock king and his skilled chums cut what Visconti calls "thinking man's rock'n'roll. I loved working with them." A blend of anthemic stompers, rockabilly stories and boogie falling somewhere between Graham Parker and early Dire Straits. A delightful stand-alone single, Get Up And Dance, should have been a smash too.

How different was the guy who made *Blackstar* from the boy you cut the *Space Oddity* album with?

When I met him, David was an eager young guy, very enthusiastic, he'd hardly met an American, so he was all over me. Once we started talking, we found out that we liked the same things. Before we had any success, for about two or three years we were just friends. We furthered our friendship by living under the same roof. We'd always have visitors over, Haddon Hall was practically an open house. I remember once we had some guy with an amazing quiff there and David was staring at him intensely all through this visit. And as soon as he left, David ran to the bathroom and combed his hair into that quiff. He was always open to any kind of influence. His antennae were always up.

Then in later years, wealth and fame introduced him to a whole circle of people who were out of my realm: very famous actors, gazillionaires and all that. He moved in the art world. He could speak eloquently on any subject and fit in anywhere. If [he was with] a bunch of Londoners he would go back to speaking like he came from Bromley. There was a lot of gravity about him in his final years, he was a deep thinker. But when he recorded *Blackstar*, when he knew that his time could be limited, it didn't stop his sense of humour in any way. He was still very open and friendly. He told everyone, "I can't come to the studio every day for medical reasons." But he was still happy as anything to be in the studio.

How successfully have you mixed the work/life balance?

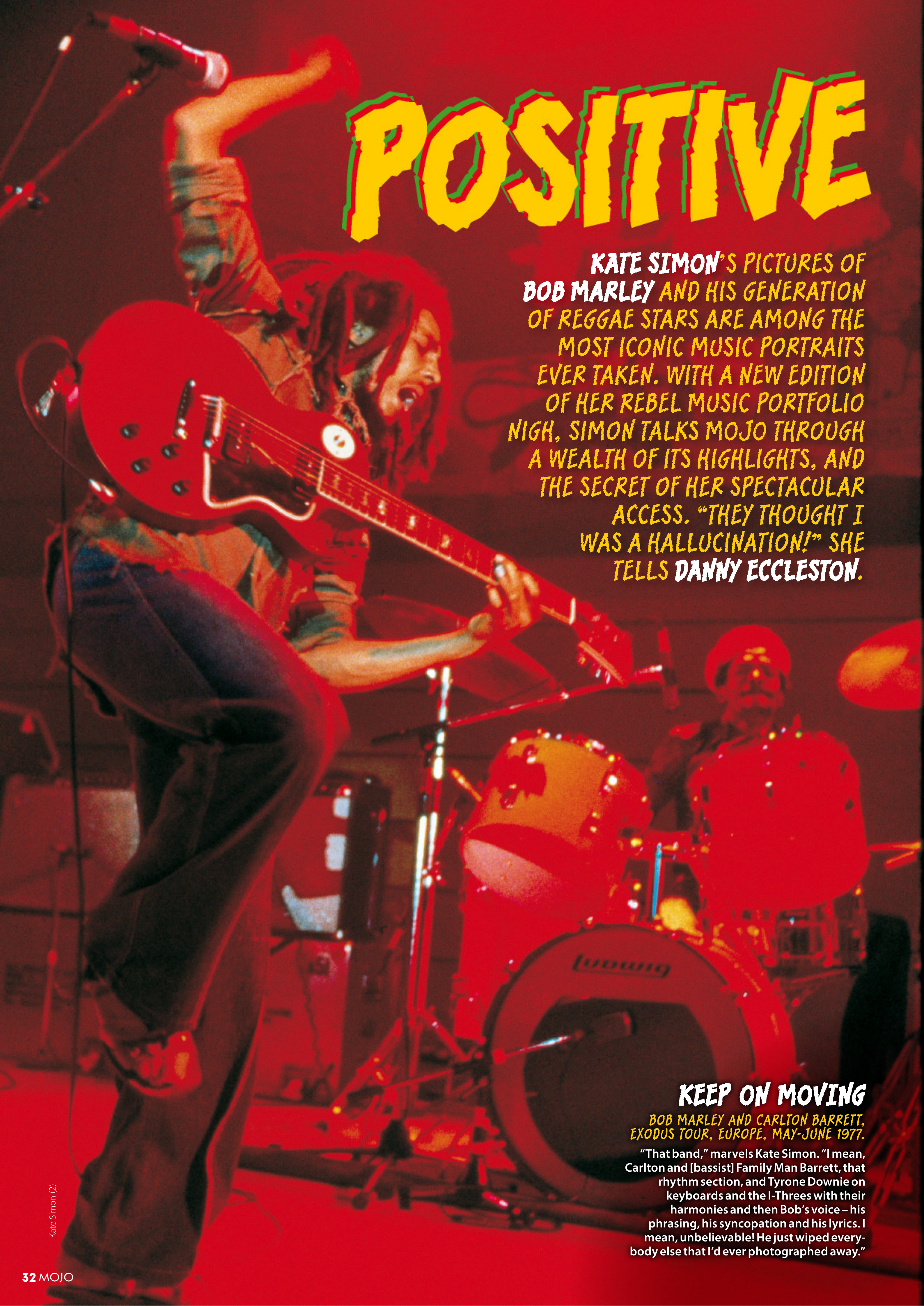
Oh, three divorces. Come on! My current partner and I have been together a long time. I've learned to balance life and work much better. I was travelling so much in the '70s and '80s. If I did a Bowie album, I'd be in New York for maybe six weeks, and my kids couldn't remember my name when I came home. So that hurt my first batch of kids a lot, and led to a divorce. Like everybody in this business I was on a lot of coke and booze to get through the night. And that's what had a bad effect on my family. I couldn't stop when I got home. I would drink a lot. And the best thing I ever did in my life was stopping everything. I've been sober 23 years. I realised, I'm not going anywhere If I keep doing this.

Are there any producers around now that you admire?

No. Absolutely not. They're making bullshit records with loops. Everything's sampled. I think old-school production with a band is the only way to make great records. Sure, I can make a record on my laptop. No problem. Any 12-year-old with a laptop and GarageBand or Ableton can.

Who were the producers you rated?

My generation was very impressed by Phil Spector. We all tried to make records like that when we had a chance. But I only have two idols, George Martin and Beethoven. Beethoven because of what he did in his day – everyone was imitating Mozart, the orchestra was 40 pieces, and this son of a gun gets 150 people on-stage for his Ninth symphony. I like that kind of thinking. He was a rule breaker, and so was George Martin. Those two have inspired me throughout my career. Breaking the rules is the only way you're gonna get somewhere new.



POSITIVE

KATE SIMON'S PICTURES OF **BOB MARLEY** AND HIS GENERATION OF REGGAE STARS ARE AMONG THE MOST ICONIC MUSIC PORTRAITS EVER TAKEN. WITH A NEW EDITION OF HER REBEL MUSIC PORTFOLIO NIGH, SIMON TALKS MOJO THROUGH A WEALTH OF ITS HIGHLIGHTS, AND THE SECRET OF HER SPECTACULAR ACCESS. "THEY THOUGHT I WAS A HALLUCINATION!" SHE TELLS **DANNY ECCLESTON**.

KEEP ON MOVING

BOB MARLEY AND CARLTON BARRETT, EXODUS TOUR, EUROPE, MAY-JUNE 1977.

"That band," marvels Kate Simon. "I mean, Carlton and [bassist] Family Man Barrett, that rhythm section, and Tyrone Downie on keyboards and the I-Threes with their harmonies and then Bob's voice – his phrasing, his syncopation and his lyrics. I mean, unbelievable! He just wiped everybody else that I'd ever photographed away."

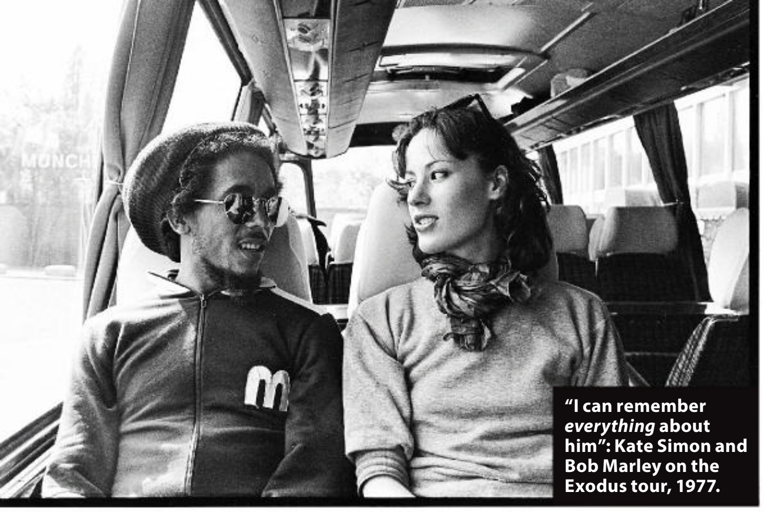
Kate Simon (2)

VIBRATION

WAKE UP AND LIVE

MARLEY ON-STAGE DURING THE EXODUS TOUR, EUROPE, MAY-JUNE 1977.

Kate Simon: "Bob was incredibly intelligent. And if a subject has that kind of depth, you can really go somewhere. You're not going to shoot him in some kind of showbiz commercial way. I mean, it's a real opportunity. He was serious, and obviously thoughtful. But he was sensitive at the same time, so there was a lot of dimension to him."



"I can remember *everything* about him": Kate Simon and Bob Marley on the Exodus tour, 1977.

THE PHOTO SHOOT WITH BUNNY WAILER – not a man enamoured with Caucasians generally – was going unusually well. So well, in fact, that Kate Simon (or Kate Si-*mon*, as her name was universally pronounced in Jamaica) was invited to Bunny's studio the next day to shoot some more. But there was a catch.

"He said, 'You got to wear a skirt,'" recalls Simon. "So I said, O-*kaaay*, and then asked around. 'Is that really necessary? I don't have a skirt!'"

The next day, Simon turned up as requested, except, as always, in jeans.

"Bunny was in the control room," recalls Simon. "And immediately he shouts, 'Kate Si-*mon!* Where's your skirt?'"

It was a rare uncomfortable experience for Simon in the world of reggae – a world that welcomed a white female photographer with a genuine passion for Jamaica's music on surprisingly equal terms. It was a passion fired by Bob Marley's July 1975 shows at the Lyceum Theatre in London and reflected in Rebel Music, her luminous collection of photographs of Marley and other reggae stars, reissued in augmented form by Genesis Publications next month.

A scion of a musical home in Poughkeepsie, New York, Simon dropped out of GWU in Washington DC in 1972, scored a job at the Photographer's Gallery in London, then a staff photographer gig at Disc magazine. She shot Elton John, David Bowie, Rod Stewart and The Who, but found her Lyceum shots, and instant rapport with Marley, an *entrée* into a whole new world of music, in the early years of reggae's international expansion under the aegis of Island Records' Chris Blackwell and Virgin's Richard Branson.

Amongst other things, Rebel Music is a time machine trip back to this literally insular world, one that could be dangerous, and not just to outsiders. Unthinkingly, Simon shot Bucky Marshall, a notorious PNP gunman, sat on the hood of his car in Kingston: "I think they thought I was a hallucination," she laughs, "or a duppy!"

But Simon's Marley portfolio is the book's real treasure trove, especially her documentation of the Exodus tour in 1977. By the time of his death in May 1981, Marley was a global superstar, as evidenced by the ghoulish interest of the UK tabloids in his funeral, which Simon also photographed.

"One of the newspapers pitched to me: if I would get a picture of Bob lying in state, they would pay me a lot of money," says Simon. "I was, like, in shock. So I said to these two gentlemen, 'Consider it done.' There was no way I was going to do that. But I figured if I said yes, it would put them off commissioning somebody else to do it."

To bring Marley back to life Simon would only need to look at her own pictures, aglow with all his charisma and sense of mission.

"It's curious," she says. "Even though he passed away on my mother's birthday, May 11, 1981, I can remember *everything* about him. And anyone who was ever associated with him – I'm sure this is true – feels exactly the same way."

The book store edition of Rebel Music: Bob Marley & Roots Reggae by Kate Simon, is released November 7. Pre-order from www.MarleyBook.com

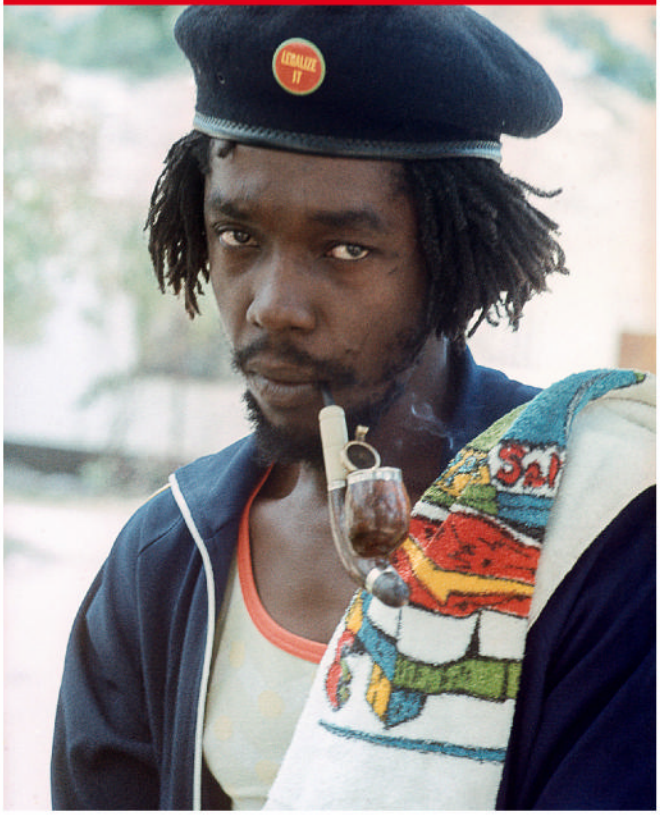
REBEL MUSIC
BOB MARLEY
& ROOTS REGGAE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KATE SIMON

Kate Simon (4)

WHAT'CHA GONNA DO?

PETER TOSH, PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED, KINGSTON, JAMAICA, 1976.

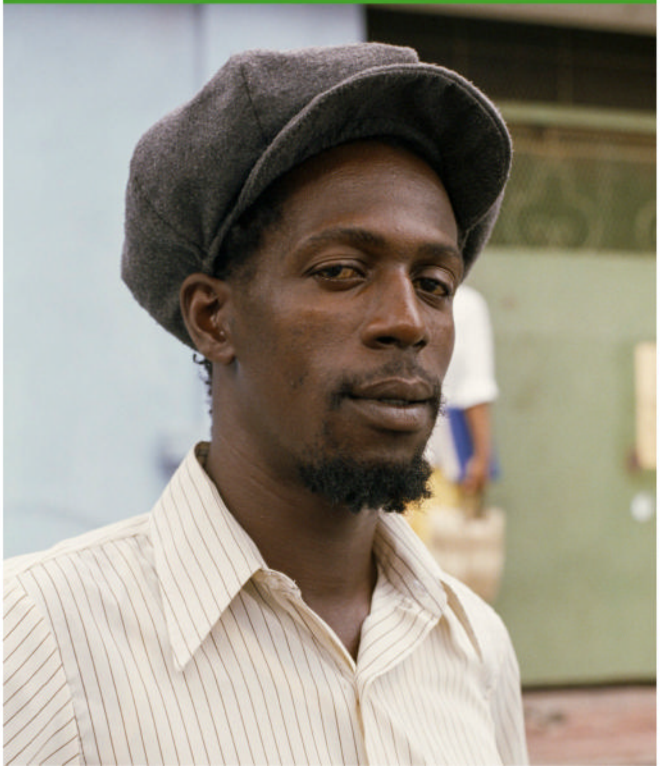
Simon captures the intimidating aura of the ex-Wailer in Tommy Cowan's yard on Kingston's Oxford Road. "He had a lot of presence, that's for sure," the photographer tells MOJO, "and a stunning speaking voice. I remember I was taking his portrait once, and this lightning went off, and he went, 'Jah Rastafari! You see that? It is I made that happen!'"



BIRTH OF THE COOL RULER

GREGORY ISAACS, PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED, KINGSTON, JAMAICA, 1976.

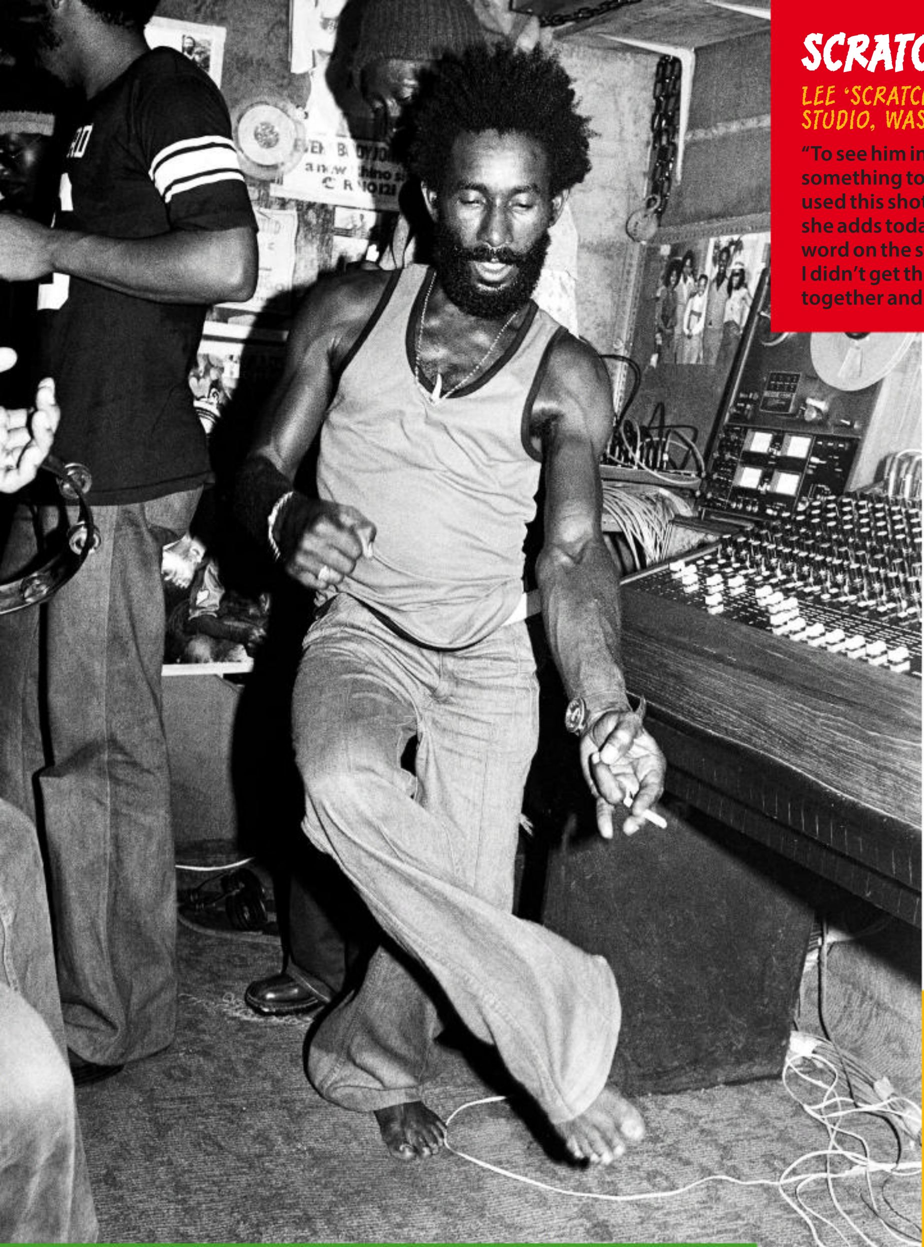
About to enter a purple patch of roots and ballad-singing, the smoothest, most intimate reggae vocalist of his generation is captured by Simon in dressed-down, off-duty mode. One of Richard Branson's signings to Virgin's Front Line imprint, an appearance in Theodoros Bafaloukos's first-rate reggsploitation movie, Rockers, and the classic *Cool Ruler* and *Soon Forward* albums were to follow for Isaacs.



DREAD ALERT

BOB MARLEY, PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED, EXODUS TOUR, MAY-JUNE 1977.

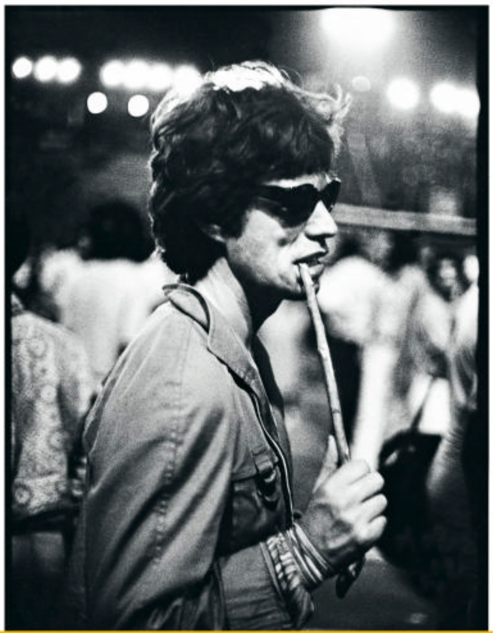
"It's impossible to articulate how much Bob Marley has helped me," says Simon. "I can't think of any other person whose music strikes me as powerfully. And it's funny – even though it's been such a long time, I still am really supported by him, and the memory of him and his music. Does that make any sense? Because that's how I feel."



SCRATCH THE SURFACE

LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY, HEPTONES SESSION, BLACK ARK STUDIO, WASHINGTON GARDENS, KINGSTON, JAMAICA, 1976.

"To see him in the studio conducting his board was really something to see, and feel," writes Simon in Rebel Music. "They used this shot on the cover of the *Arkology* box [Island, 1997]," she adds today. "Later on, he moved to New York for a while and word on the street was that he had gotten really eccentric. But I didn't get that feeling down in Kingston at all. He was pretty together and the music was really inventive."



CAN YOU HEAR THE MUSIC?

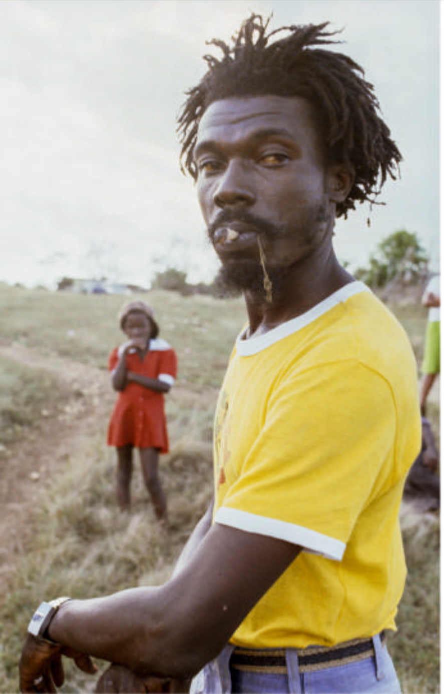
MICK JAGGER, ONE LOVE PEACE CONCERT, NATIONAL STADIUM, KINGSTON, JAMAICA, APRIL 22, 1978.

It was hoped the One Love Peace concert, headlined by Marley, would encourage détente between Jamaica's political factions and their allies among Kingston's street gangs. "I was with Marshall and [his wife] Robin Chess, Elizabeth Barraclough, Chris Blackwell, Mick Jagger and Earl McGrath. And I think we were the only white people there. I was taking pictures and I turned round to find they'd all split – because the atmosphere was pretty tense."

A FIELD OF THEIR OWN

CULTURE'S JOSEPH HILL, PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED, OUTSIDE MAY PEN, JAMAICA, 1979.

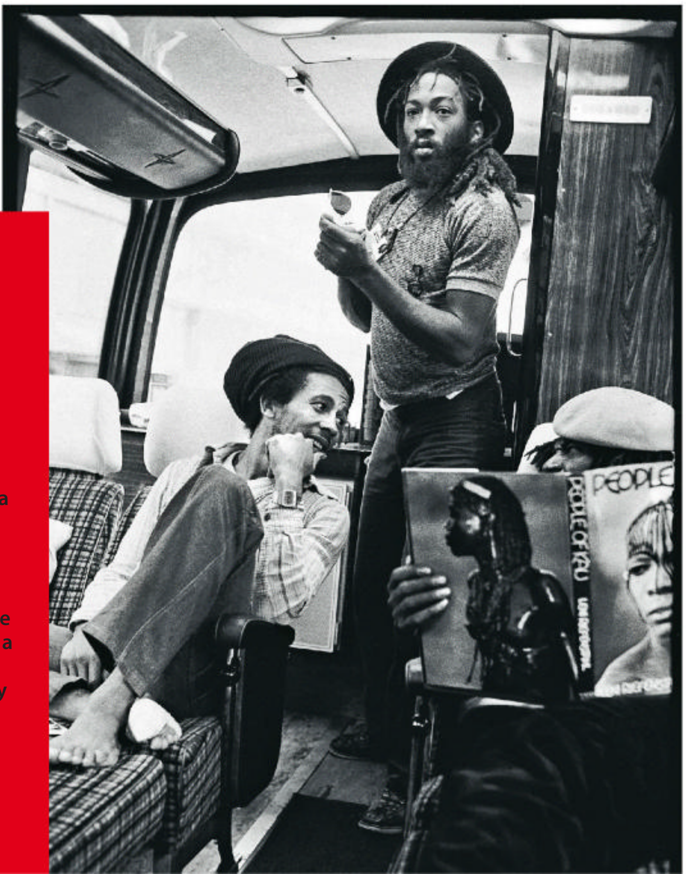
The Two Sevens Clash hitmaker had been a percussionist in the Studio One house band, the Soul Defenders, and scored solo singles before forming Culture in 1976 with Albert 'Ralph' Walker and Roy 'Kenneth' Dayes. "Joseph was really close with Bob," recalls Kate Simon. "Bob really liked him. But he was also an incredible artist in his own right. I really like that picture with the girl in the red dress in the background."



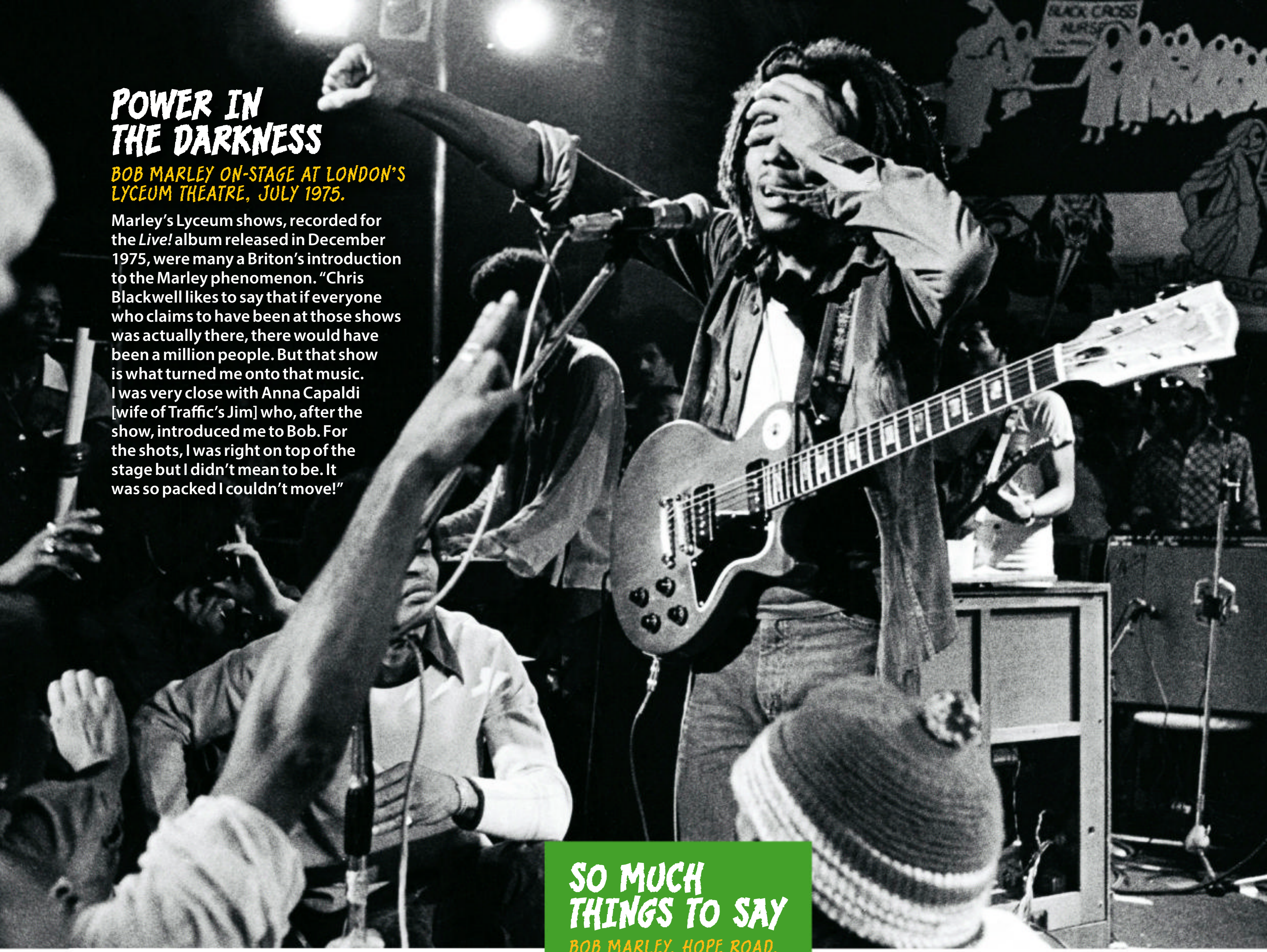
BABYLON BY BUS

BOB MARLEY, ANTONIO 'GILLIE' GILBERT (STANDING) AND SEECO PATTERSON, EXODUS TOUR, MAY-JUNE, 1977.

Patterson was The Wailers' Cuban-born percussionist and a Marley confidant from his earliest days in music. 'Gillie' Gilbert was tour chef and football fixer. "They were so sussed," says Simon. "They were the first group I knew who took a cook on the road to cook their own meals, whatever hotel they were in." Pictured: Marley's infamous bandaged toe, later diagnosed as harbouring a malignant melanoma – the starting point of the cancer that killed him in May 1981.



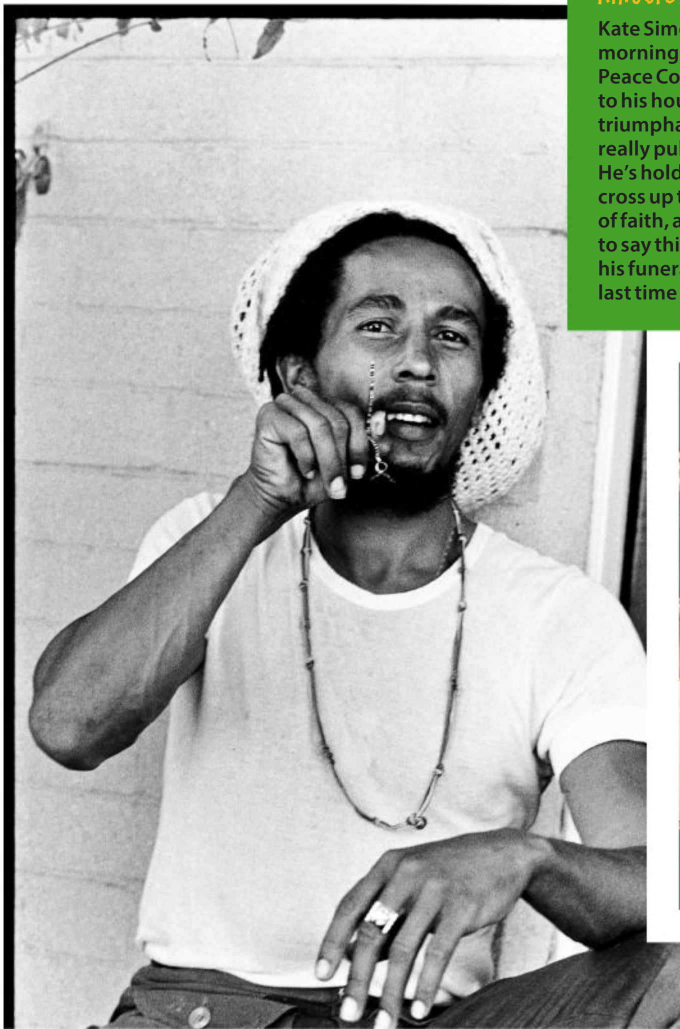
Kate Simon (7)



POWER IN THE DARKNESS

BOB MARLEY ON-STAGE AT LONDON'S LYCEUM THEATRE, JULY 1975.

Marley's Lyceum shows, recorded for the *Live!* album released in December 1975, were many a Briton's introduction to the Marley phenomenon. "Chris Blackwell likes to say that if everyone who claims to have been at those shows was actually there, there would have been a million people. But that show is what turned me onto that music. I was very close with Anna Capaldi [wife of Traffic's Jim] who, after the show, introduced me to Bob. For the shots, I was right on top of the stage but I didn't mean to be. It was so packed I couldn't move!"



SO MUCH THINGS TO SAY

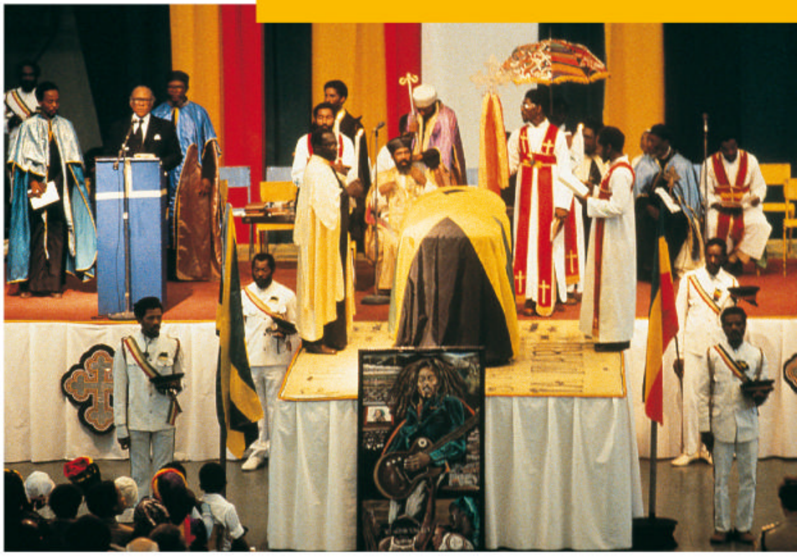
BOB MARLEY, HOPE ROAD, KINGSTON, APRIL 23, 1978.

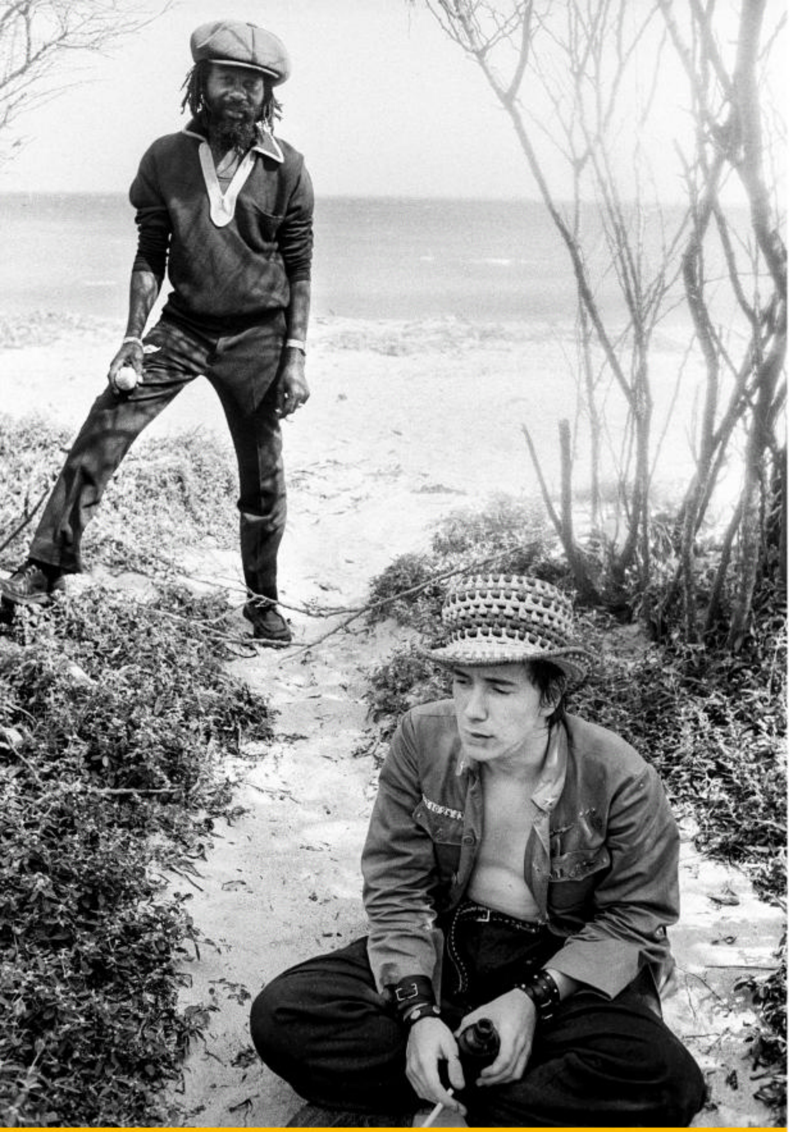
Kate Simon: "This was the morning after the One Love Peace Concert. I went over to his house. And he was so triumphant – he knew he'd really pulled something off. He's holding the Ethiopian cross up to me. He had a lot of faith, a lot of belief. I hate to say this, but aside from his funeral, this was the last time I was with him."

NO MORE TROUBLE

BOB MARLEY'S STATE FUNERAL, NATIONAL ARENA, KINGSTON, MAY 21, 1981.

"I was taking a picture of Rita next to the casket," recalls Simon. "And I remember my legs started to give way for real. And that's never happened to me before or since. After the service, I accompanied Bob's casket all the way from Kingston to Nine Mile in this blue flatbed truck, and all the way there was this vast crowd on either side of the road, six deep, booming Bob's music. The whole scene was like Cecil B DeMille."

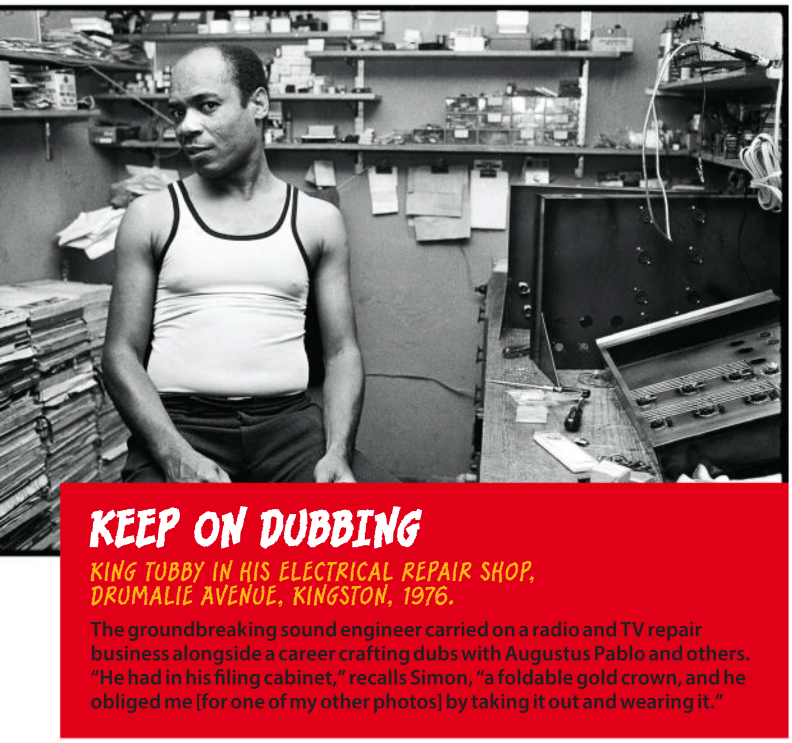




PUNKY REGGAE PARTY

U-ROY AND JOHN LYDON, HELLSHIRE BEACH, FEBRUARY, 1978.

Lydon was in Jamaica with Richard Branson, scouting for reggae acts for Virgin's Front Line label. "One time John and I were driving back from the beach," Simon recalls in Rebel Music, "and two policemen stopped us with these silver rifles; pewter coloured muskets, aimed right at us. They said, 'What do you have in your bag?' I said, 'I just have a flashgun.' That's not a word you should use in these situations.'"



KEEP ON DUBBING

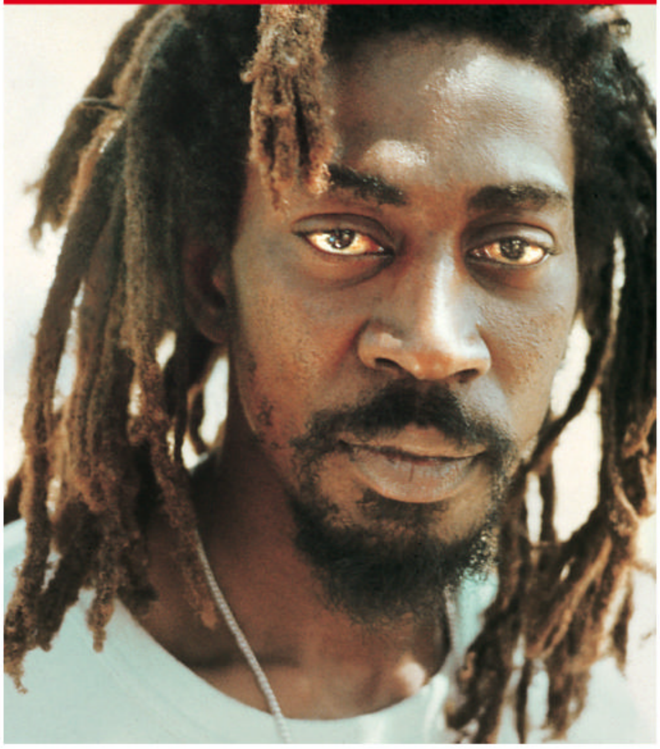
KING TUBBY IN HIS ELECTRICAL REPAIR SHOP, DRUMALIE AVENUE, KINGSTON, 1976.

The groundbreaking sound engineer carried on a radio and TV repair business alongside a career crafting dubs with Augustus Pablo and others. "He had in his filing cabinet," recalls Simon, "a foldable gold crown, and he obliged me [for one of my other photos] by taking it out and wearing it."

TROUBLE ON THE ROAD

BUNNY WAILER, TOMMY COWAN'S YARD, KINGSTON, JAMAICA, 1976.

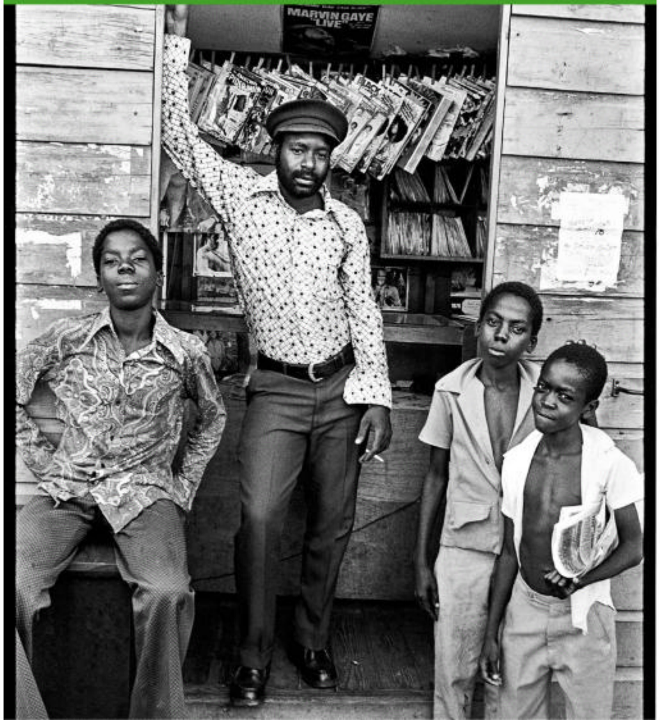
Neville O'Riley 'Bunny' Livingston left the original Wailers in 1973 along with Peter Tosh, but continued to make potent records, reflecting a more fiery stance on black independence than Marley's, and his reputation went before him. "When I was sent to Jamaica to photograph Bunny," says Simon, "we waited a week for him to come down from the hills. And finally, he came down and I'm telling you, I shot two and a half of the best rolls of film I've ever shot. I mean, I was ready for him. And you couldn't be timid to shoot him for sure."



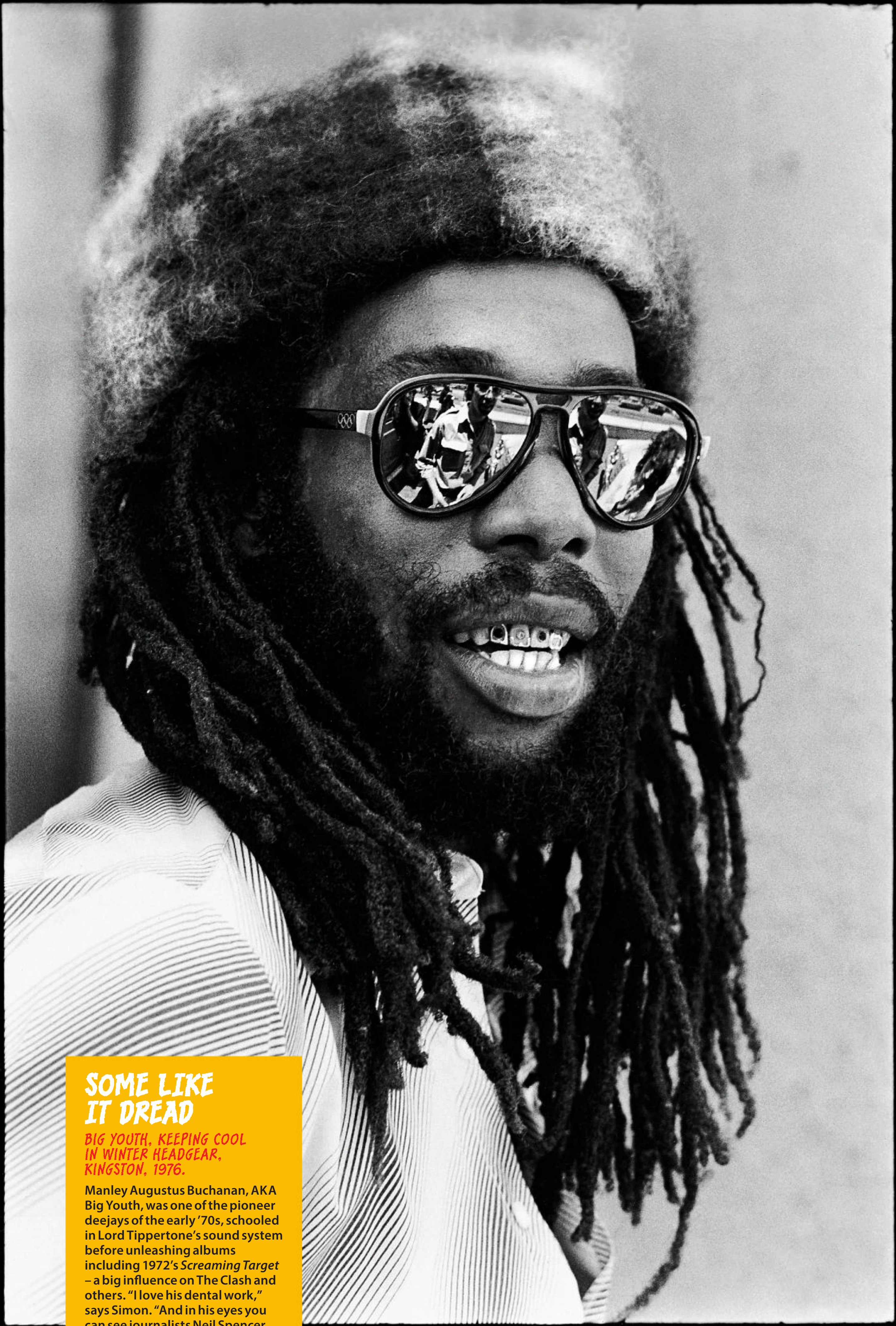
WONDERFUL WORLD, BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

THE ABYSSINIANS' DONALD MANNING AND LOCAL YOUTHS, KINGSTON, 1976.

Simon's Rebel Music photographs capture not only musicians, but many ordinary Jamaicans amused and bemused by the burgeoning international interest in their island. Unlike these youngsters, they weren't always delighted. "Once I took a cab down to Orange Street with Peter Tosh," Simon relates. "And I went over to this vegetable vendor. I pulled back to take one picture, and the whole *street* chased me down the street. Thanks, Peter!"



Kate Simon (5)



SOME LIKE IT DREAD

BIG YOUTH, KEEPING COOL IN WINTER HEADGEAR, KINGSTON, 1976.

Manley Augustus Buchanan, AKA Big Youth, was one of the pioneer deejays of the early '70s, schooled in Lord Tippertone's sound system before unleashing albums including 1972's *Screaming Target* – a big influence on The Clash and others. "I love his dental work," says Simon. "And in his eyes you can see journalists Neil Spencer and Vivien Goldman."

Some Kind Of Beautiful

A British Leonard Cohen mixed with Nico, admired by Nick Drake, John Martyn, and Bowie, Bridget St John was the square peg in England's folk-rock love-in. But, like that velvet voice, her music has only gained in resonance. And it seems there's no end to it yet. "Stuff is still coming," she tells Andrew Male. "It never stopped."

Photograph by Ray Stevenson

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1969. THE PLAN had been for the US folk singer Tom Rush to support Fairport Convention at their headlining gig at Croydon's Fairfield Halls. Then, at the last minute, Rush pulled out. For his two inexperienced replacements – acquaintances from the Soho folk scene – it was a break, but a daunting one.

"I'd already played with Nick Drake at Les Cousins [in London's Soho]," explains Bridget St John today. "We'd sat on the same stoop, not talking together, both very comfortable in our silence."

Like Drake, St John was a young, London-based singer-songwriter with mellow pipes and a recently released debut solo LP. Much like *Five Leaves Left*, *Ask Me No Questions* was a hushed and introspective collection, rich in images of nature and passing time, and weighted with an easeful bucolic melancholy. Playing live, just guitar and voice within the cavernous venue, both hiding behind fringes of long hair, they must have been hard to tell apart.

"We were both as quiet and shy as each other," smiles St John. "It was fairly early on in both of our careers and we both got totally panned."

In his now infamous Melody Maker review, Karl Dallas elected not to name the two performers but merely asked, "Why the hell did the organisers make us sit through almost an hour of sheer tedium before [Fairport Convention]?"

"I still remember that review today," says St John, with a dry laugh. "Although I'm not feeling it any more, I was devastated. I probably had just a little bit more desire to push through that feeling but I think it just shattered Nick. Maybe I had an extra layer he didn't have. However hard it was, I still wanted to do this."

Ray Stevenson

JULY 2023 AND BRIDGET ST JOHN IS STILL DOING THIS. Speaking in her studio apartment in New York's Greenwich Village, watched over by one of her three cats, the 76-year-old singer-songwriter is running down her list of forthcoming activities – it includes September gigs in the US with guitarist-vocalist Steve Gunn, a series of UK dates in October with the folk-psych singer-songwriter Emma Tricca, plus an as-yet-unconfirmed list of new record releases. However, even St John herself would admit that the past decade has seen more interest in her music than at any time since the mid-'70s. That's partly down to an excellent series of reissues from the Cherry Red label covering her four studio LPs plus a whole wealth of sessions, demos, and outtakes. But it's also worth considering the work done by her late friend, the saturnine Yorkshire singer-songwriter Michael Chapman, whose own late-career renaissance, championed by the likes of Sonic Youth, Jack Rose, Steve Gunn and Hiss Golden Messenger, allowed him to publicise her work.

"Michael always looked out for me," says St John. "He never steered me in a bad way. He saw me play my very first date at Les Cousins."

When Bridget St John played that gig in the summer of 1968 she was 21 years old. She'd been writing songs for just under a year, in between classes in French and Italian at Sheffield University.

"I'd got to university with a guitar but not knowing how to *play*," she says. "I felt drawn to the theatre group, so I'd be sat in the green room, trying to play, slowly picking stuff up." ➢

Flying high: Bridget St John, Regent's Park, London, 1970.

Bridget St. John
ask me no questions

Raised in post-war East Sheen, regarded at the time as a blighted suburb of south-west London (“We had one coffee bar, a closed-down cinema and Watney’s brewery down the road”), Bridget Anne Hobbs had grown up in a house full of music with a mother who was an accomplished classical pianist. Bridget herself had taken piano lessons from the age of five and trumpet lessons after seeing Kay Kendall blow her horn in the 1953 film comedy, Genevieve.

“Trumpet was too hard and piano was only ever about technique,” explains St John. “I wanted to be allowed to *feel* music, not be told how to be perfect at it. I asked for a guitar for many years, then I finally got one with 20 pounds my grandmother gave me when I left school. That was the beginning.”

Discouraged by a music teacher who criticised her singing (“They said it was a horrible noise”), St John’s first influences were the deep contralto of Helen Shapiro, Dusty Springfield’s husky mezzo-soprano and a 78 of The Mills Brothers’ The Window Washer Man (“like an orchestra of voices”). However, it was discovering Bob Dylan and Buffy Sainte-Marie that caused the lyrics to flow. “With Dylan I realised you could write about *anything*, whatever came into my head,” she says. “With Buffy it was her total honesty.”

Staying in Aix-En-Provence in the last year of her degree, St John fell in with a bunch of American students, one of whom was the female American singer Robin Frederick.

“Robin and I hitched up to Calais and we stayed in touch,” St John recalls. “One day she said, ‘I’d like you to meet somebody.’ We went to the flat of Theo Johnson, John Martyn’s then-manager, and that’s when I first met John.”

At just 17, the Surrey-born, Glasgow-raised singer had already released his first LP, *London Conversation*, and was well educated in the minutiae of the London folk scene.

“John helped me buy my first proper guitar,” says St John. “And took me to [Central London folk club] Bunjies. I knew nothing about folk clubs. They didn’t have microphones, so you had to balance your voice with your guitar to be heard. I was sort of learning about what a gig is.”

ALTHOUGH “NATURALLY RECLUSIVE”, ST John learned fast. Taking part in Sheffield University revues and rag balls, playing for stoned and hungover students, she was able to practice without too much concern for her audience, developing a performance style that combined her resonant voice with gently rhythmic acoustic playing to create a hypnotic mood. By the time of her graduation, in the summer of 1968, she’d told John Martyn that she was ready to play live in London.

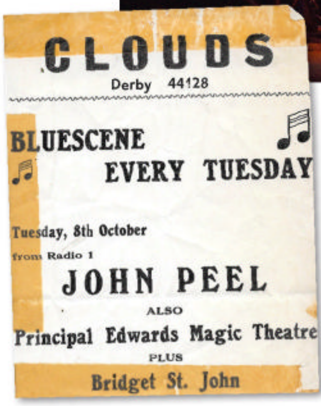
“I chose a new surname to play under from the S to Z section of the London phone directory,” she explains. But even in this sophisticated guise and with the encouragement of Martyn, playing at Bunjies was an intimidating new step: “That little wooden stage,” she recalls, “two feet higher than the audience, people so close to you. The room packed. It was terrifying.”

After the show, the Liverpool Scene poet Pete Roche approached St John and told her he was the booker for Night Ride, a new after-midnight radio show blending folk, poetry and world music, presented by the Radio 1 disc jockey, John Peel.

“Pete said he could get a tape to him,” she remembers. “John Martyn said Al Stewart had a Revox so we went to Al’s place and recorded four songs. Pete took the tape and I passed the BBC’s Board of Approval. I still have the letter!”

Between them, the four songs on the Night Ride audition tape, Ask Me No Questions, Lizard-Long-Tongue-Boy, Hello Again (Of Course), and To B Without A Hitch, encapsulated St John’s musical world: beguiling ruminations about abandoning possessions and escaping the city bustle. The evening of the broadcast, a friend taped her performance, allowing her to hear John Peel refer to St John as “my favourite lady singer after Buffy Sainte-Marie.”

Getty (3), Ray Stevenson, Courtesy Bridget St John (2)



CLOUDS
Derby 44128
BLUESCENE
EVERY TUESDAY
Tuesday, 8th October
from Radio 1
JOHN PEEL
ALSO
Principal Edwards Magic Theatre
PLUS
Bridget St. John

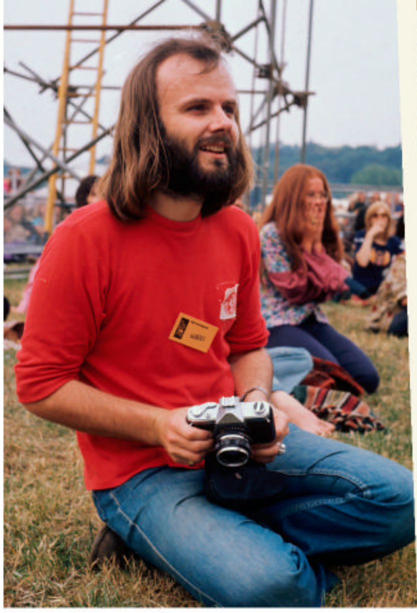
Neo-folk explosion: (clockwise from top) Bridget St John and friend, 1970, an outtake from the cover photo session for ’71’s *Songs For The Gentle Man* album; “John Peel just let me be me” – the Radio 1 DJ at Reading Festival, 1971; …*Gentle Man* producer Ron Geesin, Ladbroke Grove, 1967; on-stage at Les Cousins, Soho, London, 1969; St John with (from left) Dick Morrissey, Jim Mullen and John Martyn, June 1977; St John performing on-stage in 1974; poster for Peel’s Bluescene night featuring St John.

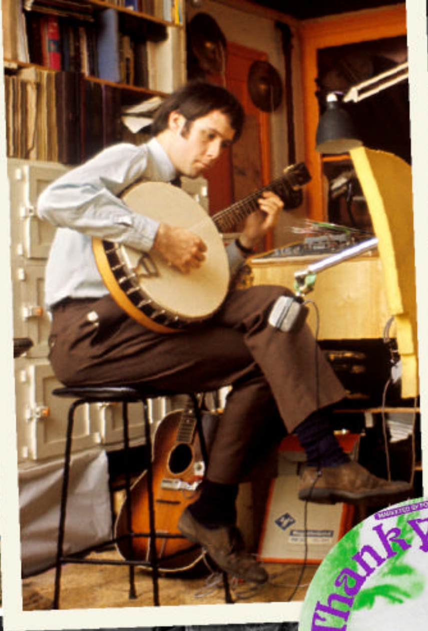
“John [Peel] lived not far from me so I went round there and hung out,” says St John. “His roommate [Pete Sanders] was a photographer and he took some pictures that ended up on my first Dandelion album.”

Named after one of Peel’s pet hamsters, the Dandelion label was launched by the DJ and his manager/business partner Clive Selwood in July 1969. Originally intended as a means for Peel to release records by “squadrons of poets and other deserving people” and “dedicated to never making a profit”, Dandelion’s first release was St John’s debut, *Ask Me No Questions*. Recorded in just two five-hour sessions, it’s one of the great undersung folk LPs of the late ’60s, the singer’s cello-like vocals spinning moody, poetic tales of city wanderings and Blakean nature with such self-explanatory titles as I Like To Be With You In The Sun and Barefeet And Hot Pavements.

“John Peel just let me be me,” says St John. “I brought John Martyn in for a couple of songs and thought, These are my friends. I listen to those early songs and it’s like, Wow, yeah, I remember that person. I *did* used to walk barefoot through the city and hitchhike everywhere! You couldn’t pay me enough to do any of that now.”

UNABLE TO DRIVE, ST JOHN OFTEN HITCHHIKED to gigs, travelled by rail or cadged lifts from Peel, playing the “quiet rooms” on the college circuit – the late-’60s equivalent of the chill-out room.





MARKETED BY POLYDOR
Thank you for...
Bridget St John

> “I listen to those early songs and it’s like, I remember that person! I *did* used to walk barefoot through the city!”
> Bridget St John

“My music is not brain-shattering,” says St John with a laugh. “Playing those spaces, travelling like that, allowed me to be a part of what was going on but not participate that much. I always felt a bit separate from the regular folk rock scene. If I was on the same bill with people like Fairport Convention we didn’t hang out.”

Similarly, St John’s folk sound was significantly removed from the Cecil Sharp traditionalism of the UK scene, and more in tune with Jerry Schoenbaum’s Verve Forecast label in the US, home to Richie Havens, Laura Nyro and Nico.

“When I saw Richie Havens use his thumb for the bass notes, I had to try that,” says St John. “But with Nico, I hadn’t heard her voice before I made my first album. I read the comparisons in the press and I bought that first solo album on Verve. I could hear what they were saying. I saw it as a line. There’s this dark side below the line and a lighter side above. I was above the line.”

While St John supported big names including The Who and Fairport Convention, she was more connected to the UK underground, on bills with Family, The Third Ear Band, The Deviants, Trees, and, on August 16, 1969, at a Free Festival in Beckenham’s Croydon Road Recreational Ground, organised by one David Bowie. “David was the low-key Master of Ceremonies,” remembers St John. “After the festival we all went back to his house where he played the Space Oddity acetate over and over. Everyone smoking joints thinking, This is really incredible. And it was!”

Another underground connection was the Scottish avant-garde composer and arranger, Ron Geesin. “I’d met Bridget whilst doing my mad Dadaist one-man performances around the folk clubs,” he explains. “She was always with the more adventurous folk people. John Martyn, Roy Harper, me and her were sitting somewhere and she said, ‘Do you fancy producing the next album?’”

“Clive Selwood originally wanted [Space Oddity and Elton John arranger] Paul Buckmaster,” says St John, “but he was asking too much. I was already friends with Ron because I babysat for him and his wife in their basement flat in Ladbroke Gove, so I asked him.”

“My approach was always, ‘Assess the limitations and compose accordingly,’” says Geesin. “I enjoyed Bridget’s poetry, her word structure, which she put to a small, trumbling folk guitar and my job was to find new textures, more expressive ways of getting these word structures out.”

Utilising players from the London Philharmonia, including the “truly amazing” bassoonist Gwydion Brooke, Geesin’s original plan was to remove St John’s guitar accompaniment completely. The closest the finished album comes to that is a waltzing arrangement of Donovan’s The Pebble And The Man for barbershop quartet, and the title track, where St John’s gentle strum is barely audible beneath four mournful trombones. “We looked at soundtracking some numbers with just strings and flutes,” says Geesin. “But in order to pitch accurately Bridget needed the guitar, as a guide and a comfort.” ➢

The gospel of St John: "There is something in Bridget's voice, and her lyrics, that pulls you in close to her," says Steve Gunn (below).

"It's An Incredibly Intimate Exchange"

Contemporary guitar king Steve Gunn on his five favourite Bridget St John songs.

City-Crazy

(from *Songs For The Gentle Man*, Dandelion, 1971)

"*Songs For The Gentle Man* is the first Bridget album that captured me. The way Ron Geesin's lush string arrangements work with Bridget's voice reminds me of that '70s Paul Simon sound. Lyrically, it has a simplicity and it's such a simple message but it's incredibly meaningful. There is something in Bridget's voice, and her lyrics, that pulls you in close to her."

Fly High

(from *Thank You For…*, Dandelion, 1972)

Bridget St-John
Thank you for...

"This album has a crazily serious line-up. The way Bridget was connected to all these musicians like John Martyn [who plays electric and acoustic guitar on the album] but also Nick Drake and Kevin Ayers, makes you pause. She was around that scene yet she's still performing today, still so gracious and humble. She sat out all those bitter, crispy years where the ambition started to collide with artistry."

To B Without A Hitch

(Dandelion A-side, 1969)

DANDELION
BRIDGET ST. JOHN
TO B WITHOUT A HITCH

"This is the first song of Bridget's I heard. It's a song caught between the city and the country and maybe that's what resonates with me, being a city person who's always wanted to escape. I love the way it comes in quickly like a rolling ramble then coasts over this breaking point and becomes super dreamy. That style of songwriting is pretty amazing."

Autumn Lullaby

(Dandelion B-side, 1969)

"I love the way this song opens so slowly and how Bridget creates this beautiful hushed landscape, using what sounds like her breathing as the rhythm. It's an incredibly intimate exchange. There's a real sense of comfort and safety. It envelops you in its embrace. I actually didn't know until recently that this was the B-side to …Hitch. What an amazing debut single."

I Don't Know If I Can Take It

(from *Jumblequeen*, Chrysalis, 1974)

"I love this song on a simple level because it has this cool groove to it. Lyrically and musically she is putting her foot down. The mid-'70s was rough-going and you can hear that she's becoming disheartened. The virtuosic session players have taken over but Bridget is pushing back and it's powerful to hear that, the combination of Bridget's agitation mixed with the production warmth."

⮜ Called *Songs For The Gentle Man*, and dedicated to her then partner, Nigel Beresford ("Nice chap," says Geesin. "A bit dreamy"), the album drew rave reviews, with a possibly biased John Peel describing it as "the new *Sgt. Pepper*", while early sales were healthy, pushing the album into the UK's Top 20 in April 1971.

"It didn't go any higher," says St John. "Today I couldn't care less but back then you're watching other musicians and wanting to achieve whatever they achieve. Then one day you say to yourself, It's not gonna happen."

ST JOHN'S THIRD LP, 1972's *THANK YOU FOR…*, would be her last for the doomed Dandelion. "Clive was pretty vocal about the label not making enough money," says St John. "They'd signed Gene Vincent thinking that might be something. It wasn't."

Produced at Sound Techniques by go-to folk rock engineer and future Buena Vista Social Club co-producer Jerry Boys, *Thank You For…* is effectively an act of wish-fulfilment, featuring what St John considered a dream touring line-up: Mighty Baby keyboardist Ian Whiteman, Quiver guitarist Tim Renwick, a rhythm section of Fairports drummer Dave Mattacks and Steeleye Span bassist Rick Kemp, John Martyn on electric and acoustic guitar, Plainsong's Andy Roberts playing the Kriwaczek String Organ, plus additional electric bass from future member of Elvis Costello's Attractions, Bruce Thomas.

"These were mostly Sound Techniques guys," says Boys. "That was one of the last studios where you could get that live, woody, in-the-room, acoustic sound. The coming fashion was for 'dead' sounding studios but Bridget wanted to hear the room."

"I still love a lot of it today," says St John. "Especially the cover of Dylan's Love Minus Zero. I see it as me trying to be more in charge of my ideas."

It was never intended to be her last LP for Dandelion. As a last-ditch attempt at a money-making venture, Clive Selwood suggested St John record an LP of standards. "We had a falling out over that," says St John. "I can't sing those songs. I haven't lived those lives."

An attempt to make a deal with MCA resulted in a cover of Leonard Cohen's Passing Thru, produced by Michael Chapman, and there was a trip to see Elton John's Rocket Records. "But then they signed Kiki Dee," says St John. "And back then most labels just had one female artist. After that I realised I was on my own."

It was 1974 and the world was changing. "Labels would say, 'We don't know how to market you,'" says St John. "'You don't present anything physically that is marketable.'"

On the advice of Rick Kemp, she signed a new management contract with US entrepreneur Jo Lustig, who'd just secured lucrative deals for Steeleye Span and Ralph McTell. "Jo made a deal with Chrysalis," explains St John. "From the start I insisted I wasn't going to dress in a certain way to fit into a label they wanted to put on me."

The mood of St John's songs had also changed, following a split from her "gentle man", Nigel Beresford, and a move to the hills of the Peak District.

"The songs were heavy," says St John. "I was getting divorced and dealing with the consequences. I'd definitely call it depression. I remember being in this little cottage, no heating or hot water, going back to ground zero and just feeling like I was standing still."

From the opening song, Sparrowpit – the name of her cottage – the resultant album, *Jumblequeen*, is a curious affair: jagged songs of pain swaddled in a production, by Ten Years After bassist Leo Lyons, that pushed the record closer to the coming AOR sound of the mid '70s.

"Chrysalis wanted to add more instruments for a bigger sound," explains Lyons. "I pulled in Mike Giles from Giles, Giles And Fripp, Bernie Marsden from UFO, and Chick Churchill from Ten Years After to add Mellotron and strings. But these were personal songs and when you start adding keyboards and strings it's difficult to get the balance right."

Horst Tappe/Bridgeman Images, Getty (2), Alamy, Cristy St John, Courtesy Bridget St John

BRIDGET St. JOHN
MICHAEL CHAPMAN
STEVE GUNN
LES VOÛTES
Mardi 27 avril 2010
20h30
19 rue des Frigos
75013 Paris
10€
myspace.com/allfib
lesvoutes.org
un concert all_fib

Dog day afternoon: (clockwise from below) St John makes a connection at Sparrowpit, near Buxton, May 14, 1973; on-stage with three guitars, 1973; flyer for a show with Michael Chapman and Steve Gunn at Les Voûtes, Paris, 2010; in shades at Union Pool, Brooklyn, NY, 2019; performing with Chapman at The Continental, Preston, June 12, 2015.

> "Bridget was a real touchstone for people like Jack Rose and Espers in the early noughties." Steve Gunn

"Leo was great," says St John. "I remember him saying, 'Your voice is really difficult because it's like velvet. It's hard to capture.'"

The two became close friends but it quickly became clear that Chrysalis was not in the least bit like Dandelion.

"It was a business," says St John. "There was no one like John [Peel] looking out for me. It didn't matter how many good reviews *Jumblequeen* got. If it didn't sell, they weren't going to pick up an option [for a second album]. Suddenly you realise 1969 was a long time ago. That's when I started to get quite depressed. Waiting for phone calls, no one getting back to you, everything taking longer and longer. I really began to understand the *business* of music."

ST JOHN PLACED HER HOPES ON A FRESH START in New York with a new partner. "It was perceived love," she says, with a dry laugh. "I'd deluded myself. So suddenly I was in a place where I knew nobody, apart from Stefan Grossman's parents. I ended up sleeping on their couch."

Gradually, however, St John began to fall in love with the city. "I'd thought about checking out New York for years," she says, "but never with an impetus. Chrysalis New York were still putting up money for sessions, so I had a musical reason to stay there, and I started to explore. There was something about the energy in this place. I felt very charged by it."

She became a regular at the Greenwich Village music club Kenny's Castaways, witness to the new wave of US 'neo-folk' artists including Steve Forbert, The Roches, and Willie Nile, working as a waitress, cook, bartender and eventually manager.

"My friendship with [Kenny's Castaways founder] Pat Kenny became very close," she says. "We had a relationship for 14 years, and he is my daughter's father."

Kenny's was frequented by record company executives and St John would regularly pass on her demo tapes but when her daughter, Cristy, was born in 1983 the music took a back seat to parenthood. However, the past decade has seen younger musicians championing St John and playing live with her, many of them drawn by the proselytising of Michael Chapman.

"Bridget was a real touchstone for people like Jack Rose and Espers in the early noughties," explains one of their number, Steve Gunn, "and to learn she was still around and playing in New York was fascinating to me. Years later I became friends with her through Michael Chapman and when Michael passed away in 2021 we just started playing together more. I try to inhabit some gentle space when I'm singing, and that's maybe an inspiration I got from Bridget."

"We're very symbiotic," says St John. "I love playing with Steve. The ease with which he listens. He makes me feel like I'm playing with John Martyn again."

St John will be back in the UK in October, playing live in London and Manchester, and there are plans to release a live LP recorded with the New York artist David Nagler. Asked if a new studio LP might be in the works, St John's answer is tantalising.

"I'm still writing. Stuff is still coming," she says. "There's always been something going on. It never stopped."

BLAKE MILLS is the go-to guitarist with a big hand in Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan's recent revivals, and a solo artist of grace and invention. But whether working for legends or for himself, he's always mining for "some precious ore". "You never want to sound like you're just talking," he tells **VICTORIA SEGAL.**

Photography by **GABI ZECCHETTO**

SOMETHING "PRETTY EXTRAORDINARY" HAPPENED TO BLAKE MILLS THIS morning. He's feeling oddly jet-lagged after a "super-early" start, but that doesn't quite explain the surreal haze collecting round the edges of his day. That's something different – the special kind of disorientation that happens when you find yourself face-to-face with a Beatle before lunch.

The guitarist, producer and – amazing, given his packed schedule – solo singer-songwriter was asked to play in a band at Ringo Starr's birthday celebrations in Los Angeles' Beverly Gardens Park, performing three Starr turns – Don't Pass Me By, Photograph and Good Night – while the newly minted 83-year-old sat watching in the front row, right in his eyeline.

"It was like a video game – you're just collecting rings, or coins," says Mills, laughing. "It's like a shopping spree of exciting dreams coming true before your eyes. Everything he'd say to you starts and ends with 'peace and love'. Classic Ringo!"

Indicating how Mills's life is unfolding, however, it's not his only recent brush with a Beatle.

"No, I've had a Paul McCartney encounter that was wonderful. It was at Joni Mitchell's house one time," explains Mills, a regular at Mitchell's musical salons. "The vibe that night was good and before he took off, he was like, 'OK, sure. I'll do a couple.'"

McCartney sat at the piano and played Lady Madonna and Maybe I'm Amazed while Mills, on guitar, quietly started to worry. "As we were approaching the guitar solo on Maybe I'm Amazed, I was thinking, 'Oh no…' – because you *have* to play that solo *verbatim*, and I was hoping I could remember it. I was going over it in my brain – 'There's a key change right before it' – but being the professional he is, he'd worked out a version that takes a detour right before the solo and comes back around to the chorus." Mills laughs. "It was kind of a near-death experience that he tastefully avoided. It was an act of kindness."

Gabi Zecchetto

IF, AS MILLS SUGGESTS, HIS LIFE IS LIKE A VIDEO GAME, THEN HE IS CURRENTLY UNLOCKING stratospheric levels. As an attendee at the Joni Jams that helped Mitchell rehabilitate after her 2015 aneurysm, he became her guitarist at her first full live performance for 20 years at 2022's Newport Folk Festival, a ➢

Stratospheric heights: Blake Mills unlocking levels at home, Los Angeles, June 2023.

ROUGH AND ROWDY WAYS
Lucinda Williams
blessed
SIMON DAWES
CARNIVORE

Serve the song: Mills hears the conversation, June 2023; (opposite, clockwise) with Jesca Hoop, Sundance Film Festival, 2008; jamming with Joni Mitchell, Newport Folk Festival, 2022; a Starr-struck Mills at Ringo's Peace & Love Celebration, July 7, 2023; at Sound City Studios, 2022.

> **"DYLAN WOULD JUST START TALKING. AND HE KEEPS GOING AND IT'S LIKE YOUR OWN PRIVATE EPISODE OF THEME TIME RADIO HOUR."**
>
> **Blake Mills**

< triumph repeated at Washington state's Gorge Amphitheatre this June.

"It's a very in-the-moment kind of experience," he explains. "Something will happen the first time and it'll be so great and Joni will have a big smile on her face and say, 'Let's play it again!' So we play it again, and the thing she did before she's not doing, and all of a sudden there's a new melody to Both Sides Now."

It's an intuitive way of working. Originally the musicians prepping for her Newport comeback were expecting Mitchell would only join in on The Circle Game, "or something where it's a singalong," adds Mills. "We were already in Newport when she would surprise us by singing a whole verse." From there, the game was changed.

"Nights spent at her house would be, 'Let's see what songs she can do.' I think she was kind of curious herself. She'd pick songs and say, 'Let's try to play Night Ride Home – I've been thinking about that song recently.' And she'd do the whole damn thing. And we'd just be stunned."

A leaseholder on a studio at the history-laden Sound City in Van Nuys, California, Mills was also on hand as a guitarist when Bob Dylan checked out the space before recording 2020's *Rough And Rowdy Ways*. "He asked me if I'd be around for a couple of weeks; he said, 'Do you live nearby?' or something. I was like, 'Yeah, I should be here.' I went through the entire thing just with that notion of *you cannot know what to expect*. Even when you start to see a pattern, it changes."

Highlights of the enigmatic process were the moments when "Bob would just start talking. Then there would be a story. And he keeps going and it's like your own private episode of Theme Time Radio Hour."

As producer, Mills has worked with artists including Laura Marling, Perfume Genius and Alabama Shakes; when the producers of Amazon Prime's music biz-themed drama Daisy Jones And The Six needed an album of pitch-perfect songs for their fictional Fleetwood Mac, they turned to Mills to synchronise the soundtrack.

Even though it's a schedule that makes 'in-demand' an understatement, Mills has also just released a fifth solo album. *Jelly Road* is a collection of meditations on shifting time and looming space sprinkled with the same we-are-golden stardust as recent Bill Callahan. It features close collaborator, Vermont jazz musician Chris Weisman, plus Meg Duffy of Hand Habits and Wendy Melvoin, once of Prince's Revolution, who added Purple Rain guitar to Skeleton Is Walking and has a *Jelly Road* instrumental named after her in tribute.

Mills says he isn't quite sure what the album title means, but it suggests a wobbly mutation of rock'n'roll argot, as well as life's quivering unpredictability.

"I don't think I'm taking it all for granted but I do also know there's a level of processing all of it that I haven't fully completed yet," says Mills, pondering the elevated company he keeps. "There's enough to chew on there for the rest of my life."

BLAKE MILLS'S SOUND CITY STUDIO BASE IS where Nirvana's *Nevermind* was recorded. "Kurt Cobain was probably the main reason that I wanted to play guitar," explains Mills, born in Santa Monica in 1986 and raised in Malibu. "It was probably 1996, so he had already passed away, but it was just turning on MTV and being inundated with images of him playing a guitar. For me, that was like having a poster of Jimmy Page or Jimi Hendrix on your wall."

Mills's music career began with schoolfriend Taylor Goldsmith in the band Simon Dawes (an amalgamation of their middle names), but he left once they'd released their 2006 debut *Carnivore*, after which they became simply Dawes. Mills recorded his self-titled 2010 album as a shop window for his session guitarist skills – subsequently deployed on records by artists from Weezer to Hans Zimmer. "I was on a Kid Rock record," he laughs. "You're kind of in the service industry side of music. I still love doing it. It's still a big part of who I am creatively."

Lucinda Williams recruited Mills for her touring band around

Gabi Zecchetto, Getty (2), Nina Westervelt, Shutterstock

JONI
JAM
NEWPORT
FOLK
2022

the time of her 2011 album *Blessed*. "He was able to adapt to different songs regardless of the style: folk or rock or blues or country," she says, before adding with a laugh: "Blake loved that hot sauce, Sriracha. He used it with abandon. That stuff is as hot as hell." There were musical quirks, too, like when he brought out a Hawaiian tiple – a zither variant – on her song Honeybee. "He was like a kid, in a good way," says Williams. "He was very playful."

Mills's career shift was facilitated by his baby band's relationship with Aimee Mann/Phoebe Bridgers producer Tony Berg. "We met when I was maybe 16, so I learned a lot about sessions, about producing and engineering. We've now worked together for the last five and a half years at Sound City."

Mills is not "dogmatic" about his working environment, but to him, the importance of Sound City – the birthplace, as he notes, of both *Fleetwood Mac* and *Nevermind* – is "huge".

"All these musicians sit down in the same spot and listen on the same speakers, and go, 'Yeah, I think we got the take.' There's something kind of holy about it."

There are no pictures of famous clients on the walls, says Mills. "It's not a museum. It's more like a spaceship. This thing is designed to go places."

EXPERIENCE THE SMOOTH LIFT-off of Mills's own music and it becomes even clearer why artists want him around. *Jelly Road* is a record designed to go places. There Is No Now passes as lightly as a cloud; the Peter Blegvad-elegant Skeleton Is Walking stretches out in a luxurious guitar solo, over the hills and far away. Mills says one of the secrets of being a welcome presence in somebody else's session is "You never want to sound like you're just talking, saying nothing", and you can hear that on *Jelly Road*. There's space for thought, no needless chatter, no ego squalls.

"In a band you almost have to be insensitive," he reflects, "carving out space for yourself artistically. But what I do so often, the foundation of it is sensitivity."

Even his new 'solo' record is a collaboration, with co-writer and co-producer Weisman. "The conversation is a much more natural form of communication than the monologue," Mills decides.

Ensuring that conversation flows is vital to Mills's work. There's a song on *Jelly Road* called Unsingable, about growing out of songs, moving on in your music, an idea that makes him think of Dylan.

"I think Bob has always been really good at that," says Mills. "He said one time when we were in the studio: 'If I could play those songs, the old songs, just like the records, I would, but I can't. I can't do that.' He's reinventing the songs because that's what's required for him to be inside them, to deliver them with the concentration that they deserve. I think you have to feel that they are relevant – otherwise, it's hopeless."

It would be easy to imagine Mills crossing names of collaborators off a giant wishlist – three impossible musicians before breakfast – but that's nothing to do with the music he makes or facilitates.

"It's all some form of mining for some precious ore," he laughs. "If you get lucky, it doesn't matter who you're in the cave with."

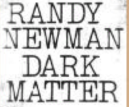
BLAKE BABIES

The best of **Blake Mills**: player, producer and auteur.

LAURA MARLING
Semper Femina
(More Alarming, 2017)

Mills's attentive production was a fine match for an artist shrugging off a little more of her English folk-singer identity on her sultry yet philosophically questing sixth album. Jazzily insinuating opening track Soothing was a Mills/Marling co-write.

RANDY NEWMAN
Dark Matter
(Nonesuch, 2017)



This session for the satirical songwriter's fifteenth album was one of the first times Mills saw "one of my heroes crouched over a lyric with a pen, crossing a word out, changing it, then crossing that out and changing it back."

BLAKE MILLS
Mutable Set
(New Dead/Verve, 2020)

Co-written with Cass McCombs, Mills's fourth solo album has an expansive, experimental open-road pull, Summer All Over and Eat My Dust's wind-chime glitter sounding like a yoga-retreat Elliott Smith, Vanishing Twin coming with a hint of Smog-like menace. Change is good.

BLAKE MILLS AND PINO PALLADINO
Notes With Attachments
(New Deal/Impulse!, 2021)

Session player solidarity! Mills met Welsh bass royalty Pino Palladino working on John Legend's 2016 LP *Darkness And Light*. This collaboration free-ranges through a global soundtrack of their own expert imagining, sidemen front and centre.

BLAKE MILLS
Jelly Road
(New Deal/Verve, 2023)

"The dinosaurs were happy/Up until they froze," declares the title track of Mills's quietly inventive fifth LP, co-written with Vermont jazz maven Chris Weisman. It's a line that catches the ember-like beauty of *Jelly Road*: warm pastoral tinged with incipient unease.

**Take this boy away:
Gram Parsons, 1969.**

Credit in here

Cry One More Time

Half a century ago, *Gram Parsons* met his maker, but not before two solo albums, rich in country soul, fulfilled a portion of his promise. The tragedy and, perhaps, the inevitability of that loss is still felt by friends and fellow musicians. "There was a transgressive aspect to Gram," they tell *Grayson Haver Currin*. "He crossed lines and crossed borders, even when it was really irresponsible."

Photograph by *Ed Caraeff*

IN THE BRIGHT LIGHT OF A NASHVILLE SPRING AFTERNOON, GLEN Dee Hardin pushes the papers, pill bottles, and paperweights to the side of the bulky brown desk he has owned for nearly 60 years. Hardin, 84, leans in close, inspecting the woodgrain and running his fingers over every scuff and stain. He is looking for the remains of one specific spill: the first night Gram Parsons came to visit Shipwreck Lounge, the home office Hardin kept at the corner of Ethel and Sarah, just outside Hollywood.

"Phil Kaufman and Gram came over to my house, another hang-out session. We were doing cocaine and whiskey right off my desk there," Hardin explains as he peers down, referring to the road manager and singer since joined in musical infamy.

Hardin pushes through a cloud of cigarette smoke and sighs. "It was so many years ago," he says. "It might have finally diminished."

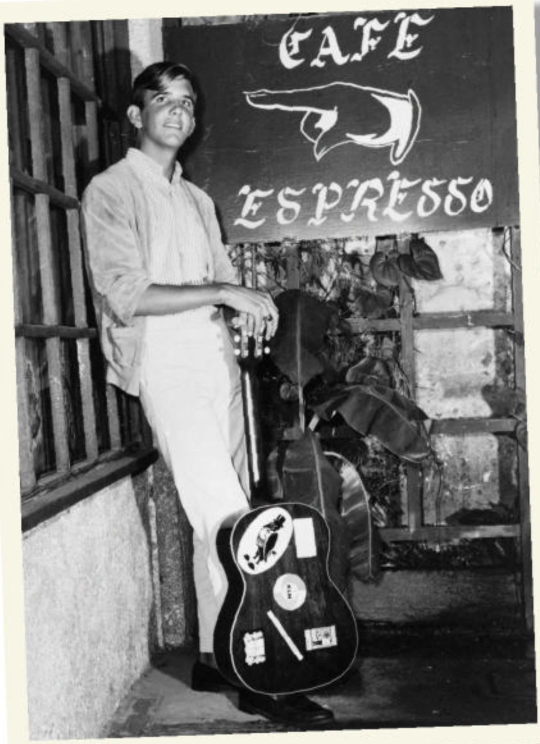
Hardin's desk was not just a party pad; it is something of a prized possession. When his family left that spacious ranch home in California's Studio City for Nashville, it came with him. He'd used it, after all, to arrange five dozen Elvis songs, not to mention tunes by Nancy Sinatra, John Denver, and Linda Ronstadt. "I've probably made $1 million at that desk," he says, beaming in his living room, tousled white hair suggesting a mischievous halo.

Hardin and Parsons had first met earlier that year, when the latter had crossed the Mojave to seek out Hardin in Las Vegas, where he was backing Elvis as a recent addition to the TCB Band.

The *enfant terrible* of an emerging admixture of country and rock, Parsons had been kicked out of The Byrds, fled his own Flying Burrito Brothers, and been booted from a Rolling Stones bacchanal in France. He had a proven new manager, a major label record deal, and a set of songs that had wooed Warner Brothers. But he didn't have a producer, let alone a band. He was hoping one of the world's best backing units – that is, Elvis's – might help. Hardin signed on, as did sizzling guitarist James Burton and steadfast drummer Ronnie Tutt.

When Parsons and Kaufman arrived at Studio City months later, the trio had so much fun the singer woke up in Hardin's flower bed, the manager by a tree near Parsons' Jaguar. His daughters, Laurie and Karen, saw strange men sleeping in the yard as they left for school. Parsons and Hardin's musical rapport, however, was slower to gel. ➢

Ed Caraeff/Iconic Images



< "I was ready to write charts, and he wasn't very well prepared at all. The songs weren't finished," Hardin says. "I told him it was time to jump on it now."

Hardin's encouragement and the arrangements he subsequently built for Parsons' heartsick beauties helped jumpstart not only the most productive part of Gram's career but also a musical sea change. *GP* and *Grievous Angel* helped return country music to its rightful place as an American *lingua franca*. If those LPs were not the start of alt-country, country rock, or what Parsons sometimes called Cosmic American Music, they were a crucial flashpoint.

They also provided the capstone for a brief life beset by tragedy, animated by ambition, and guided by the love of a good harmony. Less than two years after Parsons crossed the Mojave, Kaufman would burn his body, dead from an overdose at 26, in that very desert.

"I don't want to call it fatalism, but it *was* sort of like that. There was a transgressive aspect to Gram, pushing beyond the norm," admits Jet Thomas, Parsons' resident adviser during his three-month stint in Harvard University's Pennypacker Hall and a confidant for the rest of his life. He bailed Parsons out of jail at Harvard and again in Los Angeles. He was there when he picked up his sacrilegious Nudie suit, bejewelled with crosses, pills, and weed. "He crossed lines and crossed borders," concludes Thomas, "even when it was really irresponsible."

"Gram didn't need money, and everyone else around him did. They couldn't afford to get drunk and not perform. He could. It was his way to cope."
Jet Thomas

PARSONS' LAS VEGAS TREK was not his first communion with Elvis.

In February 1956, a month before Presley released his debut LP, Parsons – then, the nine-year-old Gram Connor – begged his friends to see the soon-to-be King in their small town's auditorium. On a bill with the Louvin Brothers and the Carter Sisters, Mother Maybelle in the lead, Presley became rock'n'roll incarnate. For Parsons, tucked into the front row, the night was a lightning bolt. "It all penetrated my mind," he recalled.

Parsons was a rich kid in Waycross, a swampy south Georgia railroad outpost of 20,000. His mother, Big Avis, was the daughter of a Florida fruit magnate; his father, Coon Dog, was a World War II veteran in charge of the family business's fruit boxes. The kids were spoiled, with Parsons throwing Saturday-morning dance parties with the records he was already collecting.

The International Submarine Band, 1967 (from left) John Nuese, Mickey Gauvin, Gram Parsons, Ian Dunlop.

But Parsons' was a world of inherited sadness. Two days before Christmas in 1958, Coon Dog killed himself. The little family retreated to Florida, where Big Avis soon married a Louisiana man with expensive tastes. It was an unruly marriage of affairs, related betrayals, and alcoholism. Music became Parsons' sanctuary, the place where he was more than the wild scion of local citrus and a way for the dashing kid with intense eyes and the pronounced cowlick to charm teenage girls.

"Every song I sing is for you," he told one of his boyhood girlfriends, Donna Class. "He told that to a lot of girls," she later told Bob Kealing in his Florida-focused Parsons biography, Calling Me Home.

Music was more than a pick-up line. Despite being shipped to a series of boarding schools, Parsons was in and out of Florida folk clubs and youth centres, a natural-born bandleader in search of his combo. When he was 17, his Shilos spent a high school summer in Greenwich Village, playing the circuit and coming up just short during an audition for Albert Grossman. (This spell is perhaps when Parsons was introduced to heroin.)

And at Harvard, which accepted Parsons only after much parental persuasion, he wrangled new bandmates and built an on-campus mythology, telling a credulous newspaper he had inked a deal with RCA. Parsons would often show up at the apartment of Jet Thomas, a fellow Southerner reared on country, to listen to the Louvins or Buck Owens.

"He came for two things: to play some music for me and personal counselling," says Thomas, who was in the Divinity School. "I don't know all the reasons Gram decided to come to Harvard, but it wasn't to come to Harvard in an academic sense."

When Parsons flunked out in December 1965, Thomas made a special arrangement with the administration: should Parsons want to return, they would allow it after a year away. "Go do your music," Thomas told Parsons. "If that doesn't work out, you can come back."

Every few months, Parsons would call to make sure the offer still stood. It barely mattered: he was headed to California to be a star.

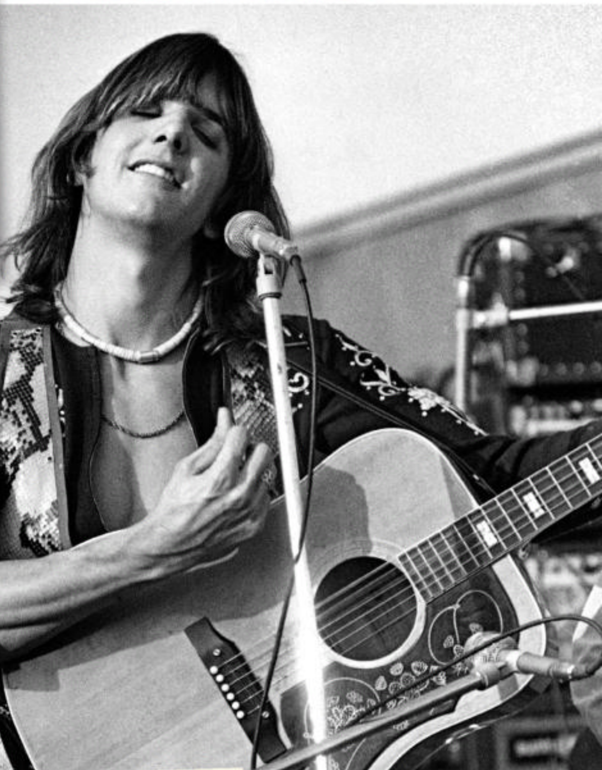
BY MARCH 1972, PARSONS – 25, in Los Angeles for less than five years – was already unsure how he still fit into the music industry, or if he ever had.

"One of my problems is understanding the necessary business requirements for anything – wanting to ignore them… but knowing certain things are necessary to get anything happening," he said that month during a discursive and narcotised conversation with Chuck Cassell, A&M Records' communications head. (The full tape was released three decades later as *Big Mouth Blues*.)

"But I like the bright lights, and that's part of country music," Parsons opined. "The country guy in the big city, who don't know where to go." In just four years, Parsons had already bailed on three

Getty (5)

The Flying Burrito Bros
STEREO
A&M



Money to burn: (clockwise from above) The Flying Burrito Brothers, 1969 (from left) Michael Clarke, Sneaky Pete Kleinow, Chris Ethridge, Chris Hillman, Parsons; Gram on-stage with the Burritos at Altamont Free Festival, December 6, 1969; The Byrds at the Grand Ole Opry, March 15, 1968 (from left) Kevin Kelley, Parsons, Roger McGuinn, Hillman; (opposite page, top) Parsons in Portland, 1965.

bands, including two of his own. Before LHI label boss Lee Hazlewood could even release The International Submarine Band's *Safe At Home*, one of the first *bona fide* country rock records, Parsons was flirting with The Byrds, a band that had helped lure him to California but seemed on the verge of break-up itself.

In fact, when Byrds bassist Chris Hillman found himself waiting in a bank line alongside Parsons in early 1968, the eternal opportunist told him the ISB was already done. Hillman invited him to a Byrds practice that night. "He knew his way around our songs, and could sing, too," Hillman wrote in his memoir, Time Between. "Keyboard player? Not really, but he more than made up for it with some songs he had written and brought in to play for us."

Parsons' five-month stint with The Byrds was pivotal for the band, himself, and the sound of rock at large. His deepening interest in country redirected a group on the cusp of cutting a heady concept album that traced music's evolution through the 20th century. Hickory Wind, his paean to the bygone innocence of his Southern youth, became a linchpin for The Byrds' country turn on *Sweetheart Of The Rodeo*. Much to the chagrin of the staid Grand Ole Opry, they played it by surprise when they became the first rock band to perform at country's 'mother church', the Ryman in Nashville.

But by the time Columbia could issue *Sweetheart*, the band had excised most of Parsons' vocals. They worried not only about potential legal entanglements with Hazlewood but also that it would misrepresent The Byrds, since Parsons stopped touring the moment The Rolling Stones showed up for their London gig at the Royal Albert ➢

WSM GRAND OLE OPRY

King Burrito #1: Gram flying high in Los Angeles, 1971; (right) Elvis Presley – "[he] penetrated my mind," said Parsons – with (centre) Parsons collaborator and TCB Band linchpin James Burton; (opposite page, from top) Emmylou Harris, Parsons' country-singing muse – "she kept getting better the more I looked at her," he said; Parsons with Nudie Cohn, designer of his infamous 'Palace Of Sin' rhinestone suit, 1969.

< Hall. He refused to continue to South Africa, insisting he was a conscientious objector to apartheid, though the band was playing there as protest.

"It wasn't for political reasons. It was because he wanted to stay in London," Roger McGuinn snapped in an interview less than a year later. "He dug it there, dug Marianne Faithfull and The Rolling Stones. He wanted to stay in that scene."

Parsons' restlessness didn't end there. By the time McGuinn inveighed against Parsons, he and Hillman had already reconnected as the Flying Burrito Brothers, playing lots of country and smoking lots of weed in Topanga Canyon. "Gram and I shared a common vision to bring real country music to a rock audience with a hip sensibility," Hillman wrote. "We agreed it would make sense for us to join forces."

The Gilded Palace Of Sin, the Burritos' debut, was the scintillating culmination of everything Parsons had already done, with R&B and rock *frisson* tucked inside classic country ache. But Parsons couldn't stay. He became convinced that Chris Ethridge was a great bassist who didn't understand country and that 'Sneaky Pete' Kleinow was a pedal steel ace who wasn't fit for the gig. He stuck around only long enough to make sure the second album didn't become what he dubbed "a freak hit".

For Jet Thomas, Parsons' already evident lack of stickability was a familial legacy – a by-product of trust fund and tragedy. "He had too much money. That was one of his biggest problems. He didn't need money, and everyone else around him did. They couldn't afford to get drunk and not perform. He could. It was his way to cope."

Getty (4)

In the fall of 1971, after Parsons had overstayed his welcome at the Stones' *Exile On Main St.* sessions in France, he rendezvoused with the Burritos in the South, sitting in with them in Charlotte and Baltimore. He was impressed by their new musicality, especially the alacrity of steel player Al Perkins and champion bluegrass fiddler Byron Berline.

"It was probably just a compliment," remembers Perkins, laughing, "but he said, 'If you'd been the steel player when I was in the band, we'd probably still be together.'"

Idle praise or not, the comment was telling. More than two years since his last real record, new music was on Parsons' mind.

EMMYLOU HARRIS HAD JUST RETURNED TO THE stage when the post-Parsons Flying Burrito Brothers became her most important fans.

The Birmingham-born daughter of a peripatetic military family, Harris dropped out of drama school in North Carolina and headed north to New York in the late '60s, attempting to tag along with the tail end of the folk revival. She began her debut, *Gliding Bird*, with a stiff Dylan cover, the arrangements never capturing her fluidity. It flopped. Suddenly a single mother trying to make ends meet, she settled with her parents in Maryland, working a day job until new friends urged her to play again. At a nearby Washington bar called Clyde's, she delivered three sets a night "for maybe about five people who couldn't care less," as she once put it.

Two people did care: Rick Roberts and Kenny Wertz, two new Burrito Brothers who she wowed with the aching Kitty Wells lament, It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels. Hillman subsequently showed, flirting with the notion of hiring Harris or

"I like the bright lights, and that's part of country music. The country guy in the big city, who don't know where to go."
Gram Parsons

Gram Parsons
GP

producing her second album. Instead, when Parsons came to play with the Burritos one last time in Baltimore, Hillman told him he'd met a singer who Parsons should duet with.

"He said, 'I heard this chick singer. She's nothing but a folk singer, but she could probably be developed into a really good country singer,'" Parsons remembered. "Well, Chris didn't know she was from Birmingham, Alabama, and she knew more about country music probably than *both* of us did."

Parsons would later insist they first met in Harris's kitchen, where they sang the George Jones-Gene Pitney duet That's All It Took. Harris, however, maintained that impromptu audition came only after Parsons joined her on-stage at Clyde's, singing gospel and country. In any event, the chemistry was clear. "Gram and I just seemed to *sing* together," she later told Ben Fong-Torres. "I wasn't aware that I was following him; at the same time, I was. It was real natural."

Parsons felt the same ease. "She just kept getting better and better, the more I looked at her," he offered. "She's got fantastic eye contact. She can sing anything you're doing in perfect harmony, as long as you look at her."

Harris drove Parsons and his new wife Gretchen back to DC. They exchanged numbers, and he said he would soon send for her. They had a record to make – a record of his own, at last.

IN SEPTEMBER 1972, GLEN HARDIN AND MOST of Parsons' recruited band convened in Hollywood at Wally Heider Studio 4. Hardin's charts, as Al Perkins remembers, were "the nicest you could imagine", with specific parts for each musician but flexibility should the singer shift the key or mood. That's if the singer could be found…

"We looked all around, even went to the bar next door to see if Gram was there. This went on for a little while," remembers Hardin, still a trace of bemused annoyance on his brow. "Finally, someone thought to look in the vocal booth, and there he was – passed out with half a jug of whiskey. That's the end of *that*: cancel the night."

Delays had stymied the sessions for months. A single mother working late in Washington six nights a week, Harris had doubted the record would ever happen, despite Parsons' repeated assurances. His search for a producer, after all, had boded ill. His party pal, Keith Richards, passed. So did Merle Haggard, despite the ostensibly idyllic days they spent together in the country legend's Bakersfield home, drinking and talking. This, Linda Ronstadt insists, was for the best.

"Oh, that wouldn't have been a good idea," Ronstadt tells MOJO, chuckling softly. "Merle was tough, and he didn't stand for any dilly-dallying. He wouldn't have thought Gram's voice was strong enough. Gram was a work in progress."

Parsons reached out to erstwhile Blind Faith bassist Ric Grech. The day the sessions started, however, Grech headed to the hospital with kidney stones. Parsons was left to helm the session himself, leaning on Hardin and veteran engineer Hugh Davies for help. Suddenly in charge, Parsons also needed shepherding. Gretchen stayed close to the studio, keeping him sober until the day's work was done.

But, really, how much help did this ensemble of aces need? Aside from the core of the TCB Band, Parsons had recruited Perkins and Berline. Pedal steel pioneer Buddy Emmons was on hand, as was Barry Tashian, Parsons' friend since Harvard and the leader of the great rock footnote, The Remains. The only relative unknown, really, was Harris.

"It was like going to another planet, completely foreign to what I was doing, which was basically folk music," Harris later said. "I went to school, and everybody saw the transcripts on *GP*."

After clearing those early hurdles, the sessions went smoothly, most songs cut in no more than three takes, Perkins remembers. Parsons' voice occasionally faltered, worn prematurely by less than a decade of hard partying.

But the spark with Harris was instant. During We'll Sweep Out The Ashes In The Morning, a country standard about an affair that can't be extinguished, they trade verses and dovetail in the chorus, delighted by the lyric's bittersweet temptation. When their voices mingle on the tail of Streets Of Baltimore, the shared tone perfectly captures the narrator's lovesick resignation. During That's All It Took they sound like they've sung together for a century. "He was really joyful," remembers Perkins. "And Emmylou was cautiously joyful, because this was all so new."

With the record almost finished, Parsons recruited Alan ➢

< Munde – an Oklahoma-born banjo whiz – to add licks on Still Feeling Blue. "I'm not a guy that has lots of ways to do things. I do what I do," says Munde today. "When Gram heard something he liked, he'd say, 'Yeah, *do that*.' He was in good shape then, and I was around him times when he was not really good at all."

Still Feeling Blue became the opener, a pronouncement of Parsons' country bona fides. "You probably remember Gram Parsons from The Flying Burrito Brothers or The Byrds," ran Reprise's radio advertisement. "But now… Gram Parsons has finally recorded an album that is truly his own."

THE STAGE WAS THE PRIZED PLATFORM FOR the teenaged Parsons. His bands, The Shilos and The Legends, played at any invitation; in his Florida hometown, his parents bought him a music venue. As he aged, though, Parsons skipped out on shows – that Byrds tour in South Africa, for instance, or Burritos gigs where the pay wasn't premium. Something better always lurked on the horizon's other side.

Now, however, he had his own deal, his own band, his own debut that took his initials as its name. He had nowhere to run. But the debut tour of Parsons and his Fallen Angels nearly derailed as soon as it began, with Warner Brothers almost scrapping the cross-country run after the first few Colorado dates. The band was woefully unrehearsed, the singer flying high on cocaine. "We just didn't learn the intros or any particular structures," steel player Neil Flanz told Bob Kealing. "It was pretty grim."

With some line-up refinement and serious rehearsals in Texas, the Fallen Angels resurrected the tour just in time. They so wowed Neil Young and Linda Ronstadt during a set in Austin that the pair joined them on-stage, then invited them over for an all-night hootenanny.

"It was a real noisy place, and I thought, This is going to be a drag," Ronstadt remembers of the set. "The minute Gram and Emmylou started singing, the whole place shut up. It was so pure and true, so passionate. I had a moment of jealousy."

The tour remained chaotic, but the Fallen Angels never actually fell. Back in California, Parsons seemed supercharged by the volte-face, the disaster turned near-coronation. His marriage was falling apart, wounded by the tense tour and his connection with Harris. He had also learned that his stepfather slipped his mother vodka as she lay dying in the hospital from alcoholism; the news

Angelic upstart: Gram backstage, March 1969.

Stereo Gram

10 tracks that map Parsons' Cosmic America, by Grayson Haver Currin.

the International Submarine Band
Safe at Home

A Satisfied Mind

(from The International Submarine Band – Safe At Home, 1968)

Parsons' voice and songwriting were not always beyond reproach; his dogged vision was. Five years before cutting his solo albums, the blueprint is clear on this foundational country rock gem. If the band is anaemic, Parsons, newly 21, is totally convincing as he offers up wisdom he's earned as a sad kid with a trust fund.

Hickory Wind

(from The Byrds – Sweetheart Of The Rodeo, 1968)

Written as a bittersweet goodbye to the South, Hickory Wind became Parsons' calling card and – here, at the start of side two of *Sweetheart* – the lodestar for The Byrds' country phase. Lined by the mercury of Lloyd Green's pedal steel, it was proof positive that new standards informed by the past were possible.

Hot Burrito #1

(from The Flying Burrito Brothers – The Gilded Palace Of Sin, 1969)

Whether it was his rough childhood or his natural temperament, there was an intrinsic wound to Parsons' voice. It's most pronounced on this vaguely lascivious and entirely resentful document of the lover left holding the bag. The Flying Burrito Brothers stay out of the way, smartly highlighting the hurt.

Wheels

(from The Flying Burrito Brothers – The Gilded Palace Of Sin, 1969)

"Pure redneck – buckskin seats, fringe hanging down": that's how Papa John Phillips described Parsons' motorcycle, which, of course, he crashed. Co-written with Chris Hillman, this hymn for living fast and possibly dying young is gorgeous and gnarled, like a handsome motorcycle devil revealing hidden scars.

The New Soft Shoe

(from Gram Parsons – GP, 1973)

Parsons often spoke about this song, buttressed by Byron Berline's poignant fiddle, as an ode to E.L. Cord, the maverick businessman and car designer of the '20s and '30s. More broadly, his most Dylan-like interrogation examines the way little indignities can ruin anyone, rendering their lives smaller than the scope of their dreams.

That's All It Took (Alternate Version)

(from Gram Parsons – The Complete Reprise Sessions, 2006)

Though their stories about the night they met differed, Harris and Parsons always agreed this classic country lament, its narrators trying and failing to get over lost love, was crucial. This slightly unfinished rendition from the *GP* sessions is a looser alternative, their voices still surprised by their combined power.

GRAM PARSONS
THE COMPLETE REPRISE SESSIONS

Sleepless Nights

(from Gram Parsons/The Flying Burrito Brothers – Sleepless Nights, 1976)

Parsons and Harris were never better than on songs written by Felice and Boudleaux Bryant, as though that married pair had predicted their star-crossed power. Beautifully rendered during the *Grievous Angel* sessions, here are two woebegone lovers, singing themselves into the others' dreams, never knowing their counterpart is asking the same lonely questions.

Love Hurts (WBCN)

(from Gram Parsons – The Complete Reprise Sessions, 2006)

During her seven-year stint at Boston's WBCN, Maxanne Sartori became a cultural force, giving young bands she loved a platform. In March 1973, she captured Harris and Parsons on Boudleaux Bryant's true-to-life anthem. They overload the microphones, and the tape wobbles, turning this into a lo-fi testament to the wounds that living and loving can leave.

Return Of The Grievous Angel

(from Gram Parsons – Grievous Angel, 1974)

Parsons returned from the near-disastrous tour for his debut with the words that began his ill-fated follow-up. Written in a dash by Boston poet Thomas Stanley Brown, it is a mantra for looking for comfort at home after a trip to the brink, for survival in a world that has you in its sights.

In My Hour Of Darkness

(from Gram Parsons – Grievous Angel, 1974)

Grievous Angel's closer is both a litany of what-could-have-been questions and a farewell fit for someone bound for destruction. Written after the death of three friends, including Byrds guitar ace Clarence White, it combines some of his most heartfelt stories with a hook you'd swear he stole from a church service. The perfect goodbye.

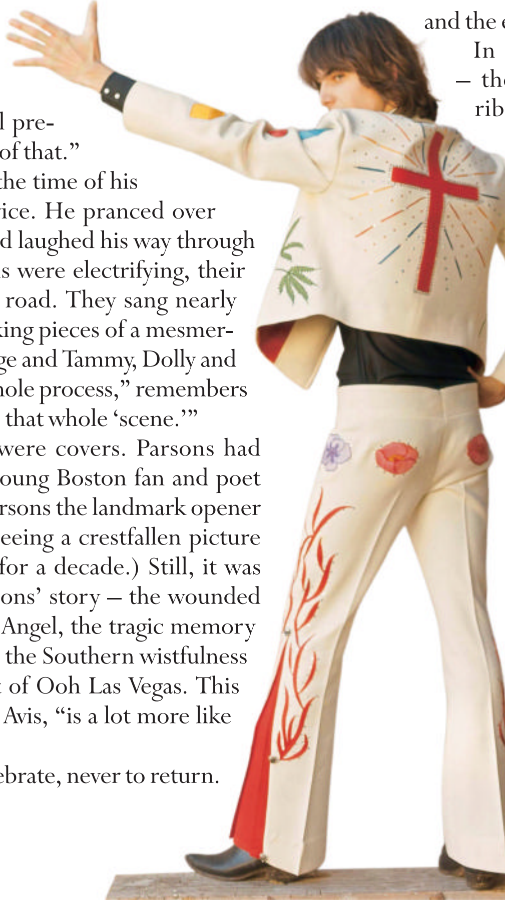
Gram Parsons
Grievous Angel

"Emmy might have been able to save Gram, but I doubt it – he was failing, falling apart." Linda Ronstadt

Made to make you blue: (clockwise from above) Emmylou Harris, N.D. Smart, Parsons and Kyle Tullis rehearsing for the Fallen Angels tour, 1973; Gretchen and Gram enjoy the party, Los Angeles, June 1973; Linda Ronstadt, who sang on In My Hour Of Darkness, the pained finale to *Grievous Angel*; Parsons in full sacrilegious Nudie suit pose, 1969.

prompted a string of seizures. And in July, Parsons' Laurel Canyon home burned, earning him a short hospital stay and costing him drafts of a few songs.

Still, late the same month, he reconvened most of the *GP* band in Studio 4, along with guests including Ronstadt and touring drummer N.D. Smart. Always a rhythmic stickler, he now had a dedicated bassist, fellow Southerner Emory Gordy. Parsons had just one new song in hand, a penetrating eulogy to three dead friends called In My Hour Of Darkness. He made up for that dearth with rare focus. The band cut the album and three unused songs – including Sleepless Nights, which he once intended as the title track – in two weeks.



"Gram began to figure out how this whole thing works, the steps," says Hardin. "He took my advice when we did the second album. He was *very* well prepared, and I enjoyed every minute of all of that."

Parsons sounded like he was having the time of his life. He shouted out Burton's solos twice. He pranced over Hardin's piano during I Can't Dance and laughed his way through a goofy faux-live medley. He and Harris were electrifying, their readymade chemistry catalysed by the road. They sang nearly every song together, becoming interlocking pieces of a mesmerising puzzle, nearing the heights of George and Tammy, Dolly and Porter. "Emmy was more adept at the whole process," remembers Perkins, chuckling, "more acclimated to that whole 'scene.'"

Four of *Grievous Angel*'s 10 songs were covers. Parsons had cut another four with other bands. A young Boston fan and poet named Thomas Stanley Brown gifted Parsons the landmark opener Return Of The Grievous Angel, after seeing a crestfallen picture of him. (Brown remained uncredited for a decade.) Still, it was a more complete encapsulation of Parsons' story – the wounded wanderlust of Return Of The Grievous Angel, the tragic memory of his late mother during Brass Buttons, the Southern wistfulness of Hickory Wind, the fast-living regret of Ooh Las Vegas. This record, Parsons soon told his kid sister, Avis, "is a lot more like what I want to accomplish."

He headed for the desert again to celebrate, never to return.

Getty (4), Kim Gottlieb-Walker

IN SEPTEMBER 1973, just two months after Parsons finished *Grievous Angel*, Hardin's daughters Laurie and Karen wondered if their dad knew either of the men on the news – the musician who had overdosed in the Mojave or the manager who had stolen his body and tried to burn it among the Joshua trees. "'Yes,' I said," Hardin grins sheepishly. "Gram was the one laying out by the flower bed."

Just then, Laurie walks into the living room and reminds her father that wasn't the first time she saw Parsons. She was just seven when Parsons' caravan rolled into Vegas to ask the TCB Band to make his record. The night after they said yes, Gram came over early to borrow some cash. "I remember thinking, Is that Elvis, without the outfit on?" Laurie says, howling. "He had that charisma. Even when I was a kid, he would walk into the room, and the energy was just, 'Wow!'"

In 26 years, that charisma helped take Parsons – the kind of bumptious rich kid with the terrible family tale – far. But then he was gone. When Kaufman called Al Perkins to tell him Parsons was dead, Perkins listened to the music they'd just made and paused on Love Hurts. How beautiful, prescient, and true it sounded now, the voices of Parsons and Harris coupled like a pair of ageing hands.

Ronstadt once went to a little party in Laurel Canyon with Parsons, Bernie Leadon, and Keith Richards. She'd gone with Leadon, but he left early. Too stoned to walk or barely talk, Parsons – "a Southern boy raised with good manners," as she puts it, ruined by the glittery promise of stardom – promised to take her home on his motorcycle. She refused, aware of the danger that surrounded him like a reverse halo.

"Emmy might have been able to save him, but I doubt it – he was failing, falling apart," she says. "He didn't get what he needed growing up, and he wasn't strong enough to survive Hollywood. It's such a shame. The finished product was pretty sad."

MOJO EYEWITNESS

HAWKWIND PERFORM THE SPACE RITUAL

After freak hit Silver Machine, Ladbroke Grove's hard-tripping space rock marauders prepared to leave the planet and blow minds via a legendary multimedia stage show which they took on tour in late '72. Cue mind-scrambling cosmologies, scorched retinas and riffs to make you ill. "The band and the audience seemed to grow into one creature," recall players and collaborators. "Being in the middle of it was something else…"

Interviews by **IAN HARRISON** • Portrait by **GIJSBERT HANEKROOT**

Hawkwind
Silver Machine

Dave Brock: We had a hit with Silver Machine [Number 3 in August 1972]. That opened so many doors for us. The money that we got, we invested back into our live show. It was jolly handy.

Doug Smith: It was wonderful when Silver Machine was a hit, and you saw the opening straight away. The BBC made a film of it for Top Of The Pops, at the end of a show at the Dunstable Civic, with the lights on – very unatmospheric. The two cameras were the size of Daleks, with three people on each one and an enormous broadcasting unit outside, the kind you saw at football matches.

Andrew Lauder: Things were going very well by then. [Albums] *X In Search Of Space* had done well [Number 18 in September 1972] and *Doremi Faso Latido* did better [Number 14 in December 1972]. They were starting to get some big crowds and playing bigger venues. I loved it when Lemmy was in the band, and Simon [King, new drummer] was great too. ➢

In electric dreams: (main image) Stacia at the epicentre of Hawkwind's Space Ritual.

Getty, Courtesy Cherry Red

Star crew assembly: Space Ritual-era Hawkwind (back row, from left) Simon King, Ian 'Lemmy' Kilmister, Stacia, Miss Renée, (front row, from left) Dave Brock, Bob Calvert, Del Dettmar, Nik Turner; (inset) covers.

IN SEARCH OF SPACE
HAWKWIND
Hawkwind
DOREMI FASOL LATIDO

"I'D GO ON-STAGE ON LSD ALL THE TIME."

Nik Turner

< **DS:** Simon was one of the good people in the band and he balanced things an awful lot. And we'd had enough of Terry [Ollis, always-nude ex-drummer] falling asleep on the drum stool because he'd take too many Mandies.

DB: The Space Ritual came into being with basically Bob Calvert [on-off poet, singer and lyricist] and [designer] Barney Bubbles coming up with this idea, and Jonathan Smeeton, who was Liquid Len and the Lensmen, doing the light show and us, obviously, doing the music side of it. It was the vision of all the people involved in it, all hands on deck, all enthusiastic.

Nik Turner: Bob wanted to do his Space Rock opera, but he spent most of his time in [mental] hospital when it was being put together. So it was put together very loosely by myself, Jonathan Smeeton and Barney Bubbles. We tried to remember how Robert wanted it and I think we did justice to it.

DB: *X In Search Of Space* had The Hawkwind Log where Calvert was writing about going off into space in a spaceship and all that, and Barney had this idea of trying to do the colours of the spheres on-stage, which would work out as the Music Of The Spheres…

Barney Bubbles (in his notes for the Space Ritual stage show): "The basic principle for the Starship and the Space Ritual is based on the Pythagorean concept of sound. Briefly, this conceived the Universe to be an immense monochord, with its single string stretched between absolute spirit and at its lowest end, absolute matter. Along this string were positioned the planets of our solar system… assuming the stage area to be our solar system, the audience becomes space outside our system… the music can awaken the Starship, but its fuel must be Audience/Hawkwind Mind-energy. We were born to go. Bless all who sail in her."

Michael Moorcock: They took a lot of their inspiration – and [spoken-word piece] Space Is Deep – from my novel The Black Corridor [a 1969 sci-fi story of social breakdown and sleeping starfarers], and I'd often discuss the project with Barney, Bob and Jon Trux [editor of west London-published paper for freaks Friends/Frendz]. By that time I had about eight or 10 fantasy bestsellers so my audience and Hawkwind's were often identical. I saw pretty much every stage of production. I was at a couple of rehearsals. We'd meet at Barney's or my place or Frendz in Portobello Road and I believe I contributed some text at some point but mostly it was Bob or Trux, who received no credit as I recall.

Miss Renée: They found me dancing underneath the flyover at Portobello Road, busking with an opera singer. I'd never heard of them but it turned out to be very high-energy and very colourful. Doug had the costumes made and we rehearsed at Middle Earth in Covent Garden, which was pretty cool.

FRIENDS
The Stoned Pyramid Interview
Hawkwind!
MAYFLOWER SCIENCE FANTASY
MOORCOCK
The Black Corridor

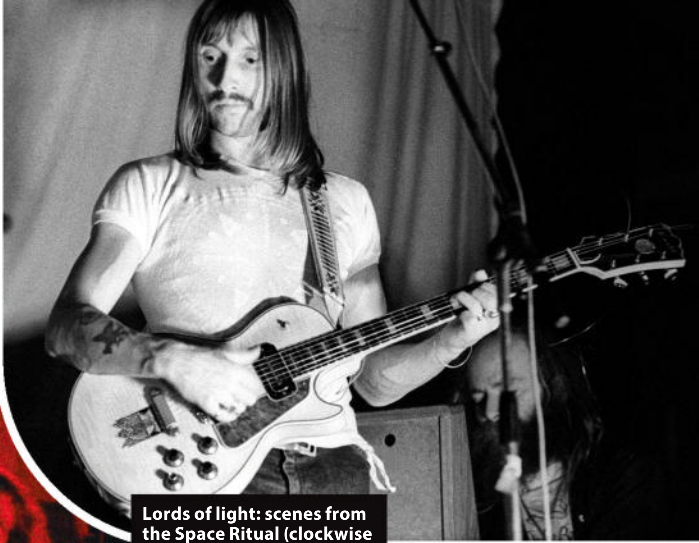
DS: I've still got all Barney's notes on how the designs on the equipment should be painted. His friend Gerry Fitzgerald painted all this equipment and built it so it looked like it had come from outer space.

Jonathan Smeeton: Barney and I had very little contact. I didn't use any of his artwork in our show.

DB: Everything was quite well organised – what tracks we were going to play, how we're going to flow into Bob doing his poems, Moorcock's poetry [The Black Corridor and Sonic Attack] and the electronics with Del [Dettmar] on the EMS synthesizer and DikMik on his audio generator. A lot of stuff was written specifically for those shows. We spent a lot of time working out three-part harmonies, [bassist] Lemmy and me singing together, and Bob. Nik used to do vocals as well, we used to all practise. It wasn't just a load of ramshackle old rubbish!

JS: When Space Ritual happened, the money flowed, the record company piled in and we went from a transit van that broke down to a 15-seat coach and a three-ton truck and a two and a half-ton van. They came with their show and I came with mine, which I'd originally built for Traffic.

Getty (3), Barry Plummer, Douglas Smith, Courtesy Cherry Red



Lords of light: scenes from the Space Ritual (clockwise from top left) Lemmy; Bob Calvert; Dave Brock and (below) Calvert in 1973; electric moments on-stage; Nik Turner; Stacia amid the vortex; Stacia breaks free.

Getty (4), Douglas Smith (2), Barry Plummer, Cherry Red

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- Dave Brock (Hawkwind singer, guitar, Captain)

- Andrew Lauder (UA Records chief)

- Michael Moorcock (poet and novelist)

- Miss Renée (dancer)

- Jonathan Smeeton (AKA Liquid Len, lighting and stage visuals coordinator)

- Doug Smith (Hawkwind manager)

- Stacia (dancer)

- Nik Turner (Hawkwind sax, flute, vocals)

AL: The tour started at the King's Lynn Corn Exchange [on November 8, 1972]. Being in the middle of it was something else, and suitably mindblowing.

JS: We burrowed around and found stuff. We had rope lights that twinkled. There was another effect called Turbulent Ripple from the 1930s, which produced a water reflection effect. We used the quite dim Aldis Tutor 100 Watt, basically a classroom projector, with about 200 slides. David A. Hardy-illustrated science fiction book covers, and we used his space landscapes as backgrounds. The London Planetarium provided me with at least 50 good slides of telescope photography, and a girl called Sally Prudence Vaughan did mandalas, very hippy stuff. We also had 10 different rotating animated effects – cloud wheels and fire discs.

I had a five-octave keyboard with automated looping sequences which ran the footlights and changed slides. A lot of it had to do with fingers drumming out the beat – the Colour Organ, it was called. It looked like a big Wurlitzer. Its whole point was to syncopate with the music. The footlights were a big deal, that's where the rhythm came from in the lighting.

AL: It wasn't a sort of floaty flowers-in-your-hair thing. It had more to do with the Hell's Angels and Notting Hill Gate. They were definitely a rock'n'roll band, which had kind of mutated, with this hardcore sci-fi aspect.

JS: Twenty minutes before the band went on there was this repetitious voice, "This is your Captain speaking…" and it became more and more insistent, and finally the house lights would go off and there'd be the final line, "…your Captain is dead." That was Calvert. Then they would start into Born To Go, which was about departure. The premise, the narrative, is all summarised in the first song – trying to leave the planet, for all the same reasons as now: the planet's fucked up and it's time to explore new wild frontiers. They were very big songs, full of power riffs before heavy metal.

DB: With Lemmy and Simon King – I mean, to hear the three of us thundering away… all good fun!

JS: Master Of The Universe was the power song of Space Ritual. It was heavy, with a lot of bass.

NT: I'd say it was the climactic song, yeah, but it was just throwaway, like I'd written it on the back of a fag packet or something! No big deal.

JS: We had a particular set of slides for Master Of The Universe – an Odin character with long hair, red and yellow it was, he used to zoom in and out on top of real pictures of galaxies which dissolved into each other. Our objective was sensation, the sensation of the visual illusion. We weren't into illuminating. The way we presented it was, never show it too long – things were glimpsed. The band appeared as shadows.

AL: Stacia wasn't lurking in the shadows too much, she was pretty full on.

MR: Nik had long red hair, and he'd move his hair while he was playing his saxophone and it would flicker in the strobe lights. It was really beautiful. I was very sweet on Nik Turner. I'm not a groupie and I never fool around, but I would have made an exception in his case, ha!

DB: It was quite often very hectic. Lemmy and me used to have these major freak-outs, because the saxophonist used to play over our vocals which used to piss us both off. Ha ha! We'd always say, "Don't forget to stop playing when we're doing the vocals," and he'd fucking carry on, drowning everything out. Used to peeve us somewhat. I threw a can of Coke at him once on-stage, but you know, it bounced off his saxophone and he didn't even notice.

MM: It is true that Nicky would sometimes inadvertently break into someone else's solo in the wrong key but it was all part of the atmosphere and the audience never seemed to mind. The rapport between the band and the audience was extraordinary and was actually helped by the occasional bit of off-key playing. I have huge admiration for Dave's control of the set on-stage. His instincts would bring the music up and down, changing the mood, and building the atmosphere. The band and the audience seemed to grow into one creature blending with the music and the lightshow.

NT: All these things were there to be mindblowing, and exciting and fluorescent! I'd do sort of ballet dancing with Stacia… I'd go on-stage on LSD all the time. There were wonderful,

➢

Born to go: (clockwise) Lemmy on-stage in Amsterdam, 1974; Turner on-stage in London, 1973; Calvert gets in character – "he used to frighten people with the intensity of his reality."

≺ electric moments, awesome in fact.

MR: They played Holst's The Planets and The Beach Boys on the Mercedes bus. Lemmy was nice but mostly he slept. I fell asleep with my head next to his and I managed to get very serious headlice. Stacia and I squabbled some, she was a couple of years younger than me, and I had my problems and she had hers. Doug and I bumped noses a bit because he wanted a fog machine, which made the stage really slippery. There was a mime, Tony Crerar, who spent a lot of time telling me about ley lines when we were travelling.

Stacia: Tony Crerar worked in panto and was a student of Marcel Marceau. Renée was tiny and blonde and really flexible, almost double jointed, everything that I wasn't. When she started dancing, I was just gone. She was so important to the Space Ritual and I have nothing but respect for her.

MR: I danced on the side of the stage where Nik and Bob were, Stacia was on the other side. The costumes really picked up the light very well. I did acrobatic/interpretative, I viewed myself as an athlete, I was stone cold sober. Stacia I'd call a much more dramatic dancer, she goes for intense bursts and striking poses, and she was very tall and very voluptuous.

S: It was all totally spontaneous, the only thing that wasn't was 'The Robot', for the song Brainstorm. Basically, somebody had given a robot a pill and suddenly it can sing and dance and roll joints – it was breaking free from its constraints and trying to live. As it goes on it realises it's going back, and it's fighting against going back to being a robot – there's a photograph of that where I'm writhing on the floor, with a black skirt with blue stars on it. I always felt totally connected to the people in the crowd, and I was reflecting what I was getting from them. I do think Hawkwind opened up people's minds for them to discover who they were.

DB: If people had been drinking tons of beer they'd be fucking ill, because of the sound vibrations and the flashing lights. Our music was more intellectual – to get stoned to, and go to a higher realm, ha ha!

MR: It was quite magical. To me it came across in waves – they really liked to hit a lot of crescendos, they'd hit a peak and they'd stay on a peak for a long period of time.

DB: I remember doing Liverpool Stadium [on December 23, 1972]. When we drove down, there was this huge queue of people queuing up. They started cheering and waving, like when the Roman Emperor arrived at the Senate! Things like that were going on all of a sudden. They had boxing and wrestling at the Liverpool Stadium, so the audience were all the way round us and we were in the middle… in the gladiatorial arena, you know, surrounded by the baying mob!

DS: It was an amazing tour. They finished it, I think, at the Sundown in Brixton [on December 30, 1972] and Nik went in the audience and thanked everyone. Me and Dave had to drop some stuff off afterwards and we said, "Call us when you know where we're going to have the last night party." We never got the call. "Why didn't you call us?" "Uh, we forgot." Heh! That stuck in my memory.

AL: I think it was their idea to put it out as an album. It wasn't expensive to hire a mobile studio for the night and I had a great live engineer, Vic Maile, who was kind of king of live recording.

DB: When we mixed it I think we all took some LSD, which is why the original album's a bit messy in places. But that's the way it was then.

DS: Then we toured in Europe. In Switzerland the promoter had all these posters printed up called 'The Space Ritual Ballet', ha! The European side was excellent, they went down incredibly well.

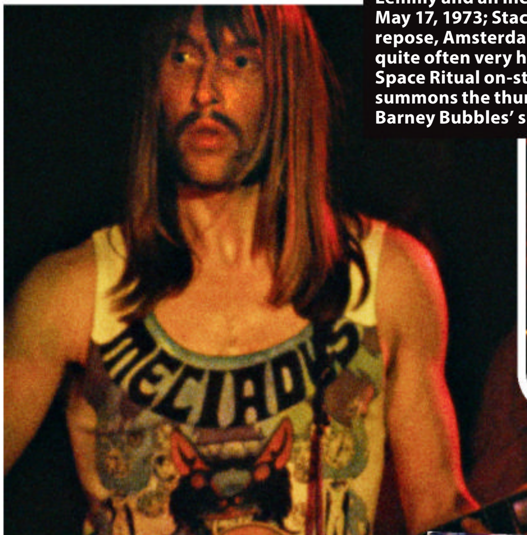
JS: Doug understood the kind of crazies he was dealing with and knew how to keep people separated and how to keep them joined. I think Lemmy was one of the most stable people, but collectively, everybody was dysfunctional. Bob was a manic depressive but nobody recognised that in those days, it was just Bob being Bob.

DB: Sometimes Bob was quite normal, but other times he could be very difficult to deal with. He'd get so involved in the character he was playing on-stage he couldn't get out. He'd go on *after* coming off-stage, he'd stay up all night, he couldn't sleep. It's like if you knew somebody who'd taken loads of speed, and they'd just constantly be talking. Lemmy would be saying, "For fuck's sake Calvert, can you shut up for a while?" Or he'd become Mr Punch or [British TV comedian] Frankie Howerd for the day, and go on-stage singing as if he was Frankie Howerd, going, "Oh no, missus…"

I mean, it is funny. He's a really eccentric character. But you've got to remember, it was quite an eccentric band of weird characters, taking different drugs and getting stoned. Turner would be taking acid and DikMik [Michael Davies, keyboard player] and Lemmy would be on speed, all these fractious sort of things happening.

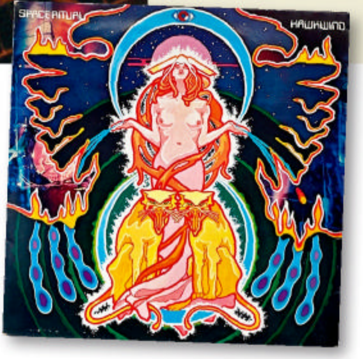
DS: Robert was probably bi-polar. I wasn't involved with them then, but later [in 1977] they left him on the street in Paris and drove off. He was running after them saying, "You've forgotten me, you bastards."

Getty (4), Courtesy Cherry Red



Masters of their universe: (clockwise from above) Lemmy and friend beat the traffic; Brock, Lemmy and an incognito Turner, May 17, 1973; Stacia in off-duty repose, Amsterdam, 1972; "it was quite often very hectic" – the Space Ritual on-stage; Brock summons the thunder; (below) Barney Bubbles' sleeve.

> **"I MET STEVIE WONDER, STANDING NEXT TO A METEORITE."**
> **Stacia**



DB: On-stage in Paris he nearly cut [bassist] Adrian Shaw's head off with a sword because he got so involved in the character that he was playing – fucking hell.

AL: Bob got very, very into things. He did turn up in the office sometimes dressed up as a fighter pilot, in goggles. I think around that time he was going out with Helen Mirren.

NT: Bob used to frighten people with the intensity of his reality. He was very single-minded about what he did.

AL: People think that working with Hawkwind would be some sort of horror show, with too many loose cannons, but it was remarkably easy. Barney's sleeve for *Space Ritual* was incredible. I don't remember the cost elements of more eccentric packaging being a problem. This is what it costs to make, so we charge more – the people who wanted it would want it even if it cost 35p more than a normal album.

DS: The album had just come out when they played the Empire Pool in Wembley [May 27, 1973: the album *The Space Ritual Alive In Liverpool And London* peaked at Number 9 two weeks later]. It was probably the biggest venue they did. Mike Stewart, head of UA worldwide, came and he was a big man, so big we had to have two seats for him and take the middle arm out. He was very impressed. That was really the key, to get the Americans on board so they'd spend the money.

MR: I had no intention of leaving, until I was escorted out [after the UK tour she went to Morocco and experienced immigration difficulties on returning]. They didn't call me when they came to the States.

S: When we did our first American tour, the party at the Hayden Planetarium [in New York on November 25, 1973] was special. There were all these amazing transvestites and I met Stevie Wonder, standing next to a meteorite. I wasn't star-struck, but I was in awe.

DS: On our first trip to America the venues were so big it was untrue. The biggest was at the Chicago Auditorium, 6,000 people, we just didn't believe it. We didn't take the full Space Ritual set, but the second time we took everything.

DB: Everybody got on well with each other. You know, we had the same crew working with us for quite a few years, too. It was quite a sort of camaraderie thing, you know.

DS: Space Ritual was the peak, without a doubt. They didn't use it; it just became an excuse to do more gigs, and it started fading. It was a shame they couldn't carry on getting on. Falling out with Barney was a big problem, there was an awful lot of him in what they presented on-stage. Liquid Len as well.

JS: I think the Space Ritual period started with *X In Search Of Space* and ended when Stacia and I left after Reading in '75.

Simon King (drums, in Sounds, September 1, 1973): "The longer we do this 'Space Ritual' the more people are going to expect us to keep on doing it, and we don't want to get pushed into the rut of doing that."

DB: When we went into *Warrior At The Edge Of Time* [Number 13 in May '75] we started going off on different tangents, into a bit of a sword and sorcery sort of thing. It started changing. But the Space Ritual was a special time, absolutely. The funny thing is, we look back on it and it's, fucking hell, that's quite a big epic thing to have done. We're playing at the Albert Hall in September and we're going to merge a bit of the Space Ritual into what we're doing now, do a couple of numbers from it and try and recreate a bit of the old psychedelic lights.

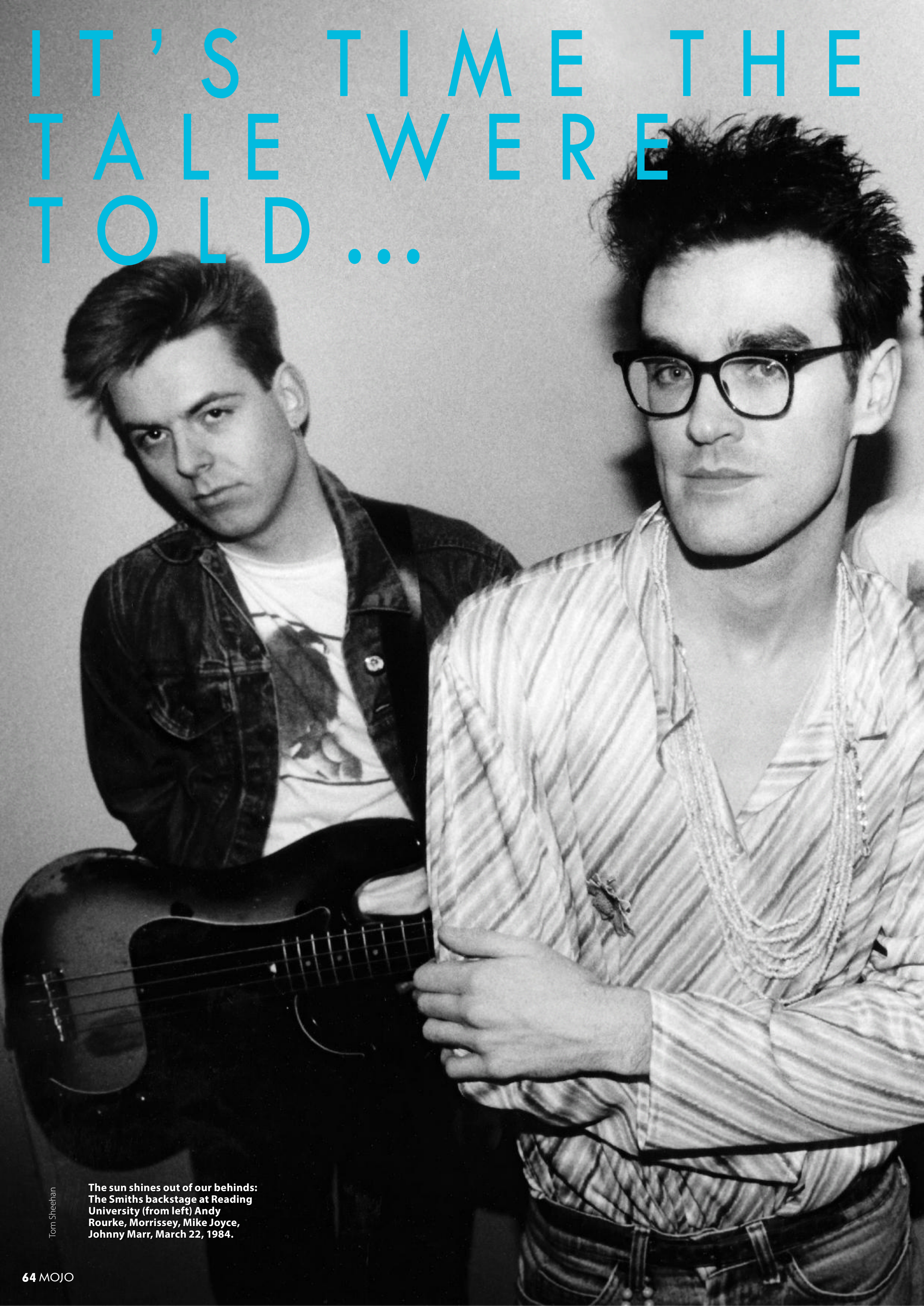
NT: I think the Space Ritual was quite ground-breaking, really. It was no big deal on one level, but it did stuff that hadn't been done before, creating a stage show that was really interesting and unprecedented. It was done on a really low budget actually, and maybe it's a good thing there isn't any film of it, because it might fall short of people's expectations.

DB: Rob Godwin, who used to run Griffin records in America, has done an AI animation of Born To Go, with all the light shows and everything, he's even got the wind machine. He's really into making everything perfect and it's taken him two years – it looks like the band on-stage, it's that good. It's quite weird because a couple of times he's got me and Lemmy looking at each other playing.

S: To experience it now, you can read the album sleeve, play the music full blast in a dark room, and let it take you with it. That's what the fans did, they stepped on board and went with it. Ⓜ

Hawkwind play Royal Albert Hall on September 29. The same day Space Ritual gets an 11-disc reissue via Atomhenge/Cherry Red. Andrew Lauder's memoir Happy Trails is published by White Rabbit. Nik Turner interviewed in 2019.

IT'S TIME THE TALE WERE TOLD…



Tom Sheehan

The sun shines out of our behinds: The Smiths backstage at Reading University (from left) Andy Rourke, Morrissey, Mike Joyce, Johnny Marr, March 22, 1984.

…About THE SMITHS and how they rebooted British guitar music, 40 years ago. In the light of bassist Andy Rourke's tragic recent passing, their timeless alloy of '60s guitars and '80s dissent feels greater than ever, and – as new interviews with key players reveal – they were never more potent than in their vital first phase, 1982-84. "They knew they were riding a wave," discovers TOM DOYLE. Portrait by TOM SHEEHAN.

THE CAMERA PANS ACROSS A FACTORY FLOOR STREWN WITH DYING flowers, sweeps past a record cover featuring a prostrate French film star (Jean Marais, in a still from Jean Cocteau's 1950 film, Orphée) and rises to focus on a striking individual. Bequiffed and wearing a baggy grey blouse unbuttoned almost to the navel, loose strings of pearls and beads around his neck, he is inexplicably whirling a fast-disintegrating bunch of gladioli in his right hand, as the band launch into the song.

The date this vision hits the eyeballs of the nation is November 4, 1983. The striking individual is Steven Patrick Morrissey and the band is The Smiths. Belied by their air of confidence, they are appearing on TV for the first time, via Channel 4's thrillingly ramshackle Friday teatime music show, The Tube, watched by approximately one million young Britons. The four-piece have been filmed on location, in the controlled environment of their rehearsal room above their manager Joe Moss's Crazy Face clothes shop in Portland Street, central Manchester. "It is this rehearsal space that makes us," Morrissey will reflect, in his memoir published 30 years on, "and it is here that we are free to re-order the universe."

A feat of cosmic convulsion? Not quite, but This Charming Man, with which The Smiths introduce themselves to the viewing public, is such a unique blend of influences as to immediately sound original. Driving Motown drums and bass (echoing The Supremes' You Can't Hurry Love); intricate, chiming guitar figures last heard in '60s folk rock, and a lead vocal snaking up and down the scales, relating some kind of encounter, possibly sexual, layered with intrigue. It's a performance designed for maximum impact that the next day will send hordes of watchers rushing to the record shops.

Oddly, however, only three members of the band – Morrissey, drummer Mike Joyce and bassist Andy Rourke – are clearly visible in the film clip. The Tube's director, deciding that their guitarist, Johnny Marr, appears too druggy-looking, chooses to depict only his hands in close-up. He is revealed full-length only in distant long shots.

"Apparently, he thought I looked too drop-down decadent for the nation's youth to be able to cope with," noted Marr, wryly, in his own 2016 memoir.

Three days later, The Smiths repeat the trick, as a different clip is broadcast on BBC2's Riverside pop digest. This time, the band are seen miming in a disused London power station, similarly festooned with ornamental blossoms. But the group's most high-profile televisual moment lies two weeks hence, when they make their Top Of The Pops debut with This Charming Man on Thursday, November 24.

For this performance, Morrissey's bouquet is bigger, his moves conspicuously camper, as Marr – worrying he'll slip on a stage slick with crushed petals – plays a totemic red 12-string Rickenbacker once owned by The Byrds' Roger McGuinn and borrowed for the occasion by The Smiths' producer John Porter from his friend, Phil Manzanera of Roxy Music.

"I just thought there was something really, really special there," remembers the band's future engineer/co-producer, Stephen Street, one of the millions watching the show that evening. "Morrissey's vocal delivery was such an original sound. They looked great, they sounded great. They had everything going for them."

Straight after Top Of The Pops, The Smiths speed to Euston station to catch the train to Manchester in time for a wildly over-subscribed gig at the Haçienda the same night, which ends with four encores. En route, Johnny Marr calls his girlfriend Angie to ask her how the TV appearance had gone down. She tells him, "I think you've blown some minds."

"NOTHING SPURS YOU ON LIKE ANGER. WE WERE ANGRY ABOUT ALL THE UGLY PEOPLE WHO CONTROL THIS BUSINESS."

MORRISSEY

Paul Slattery (2), Alamy (2), Camera Press/Paul Rider

At least one of those minds belonging to a future pop star…

"None of my mates liked them," Noel Gallagher would later recall. "They were more hooligan types. But I thought it was life-changing."

If it's not Bowie's Starman on TOTP in July '72, it is in the genre. For all their call-backs to the cultural touchstones of the mid '60s and that era's hard-edged, sharp-witted pop, The Smiths feel like something new: fuel-injected guitar music that has nothing to do with the big beasts of the '70s still roaming the charts, equally distanced from the gloomy remnants of post-punk and the aspirational glitz of the New Romantics. Music that acknowledges straitened times in a second term of Thatcher's Tories, re-elected that June, rich in images of entrapment, disenfranchisement and dreams of escape.

"Nothing spurs you on like anger," their singer declared in the pages of Sounds magazine the week before, fast revealing his idiosyncratic character and gift for quote-giving. "We were angry about all the ugly people who control this business and all the ugly faces on Top Of The Pops. Why all the ugliness?

"And of course there was nothing more repellent than the synthesizer," he added, kicking the vogue for electronic pop. "It was really time to sweep all that down the drain."

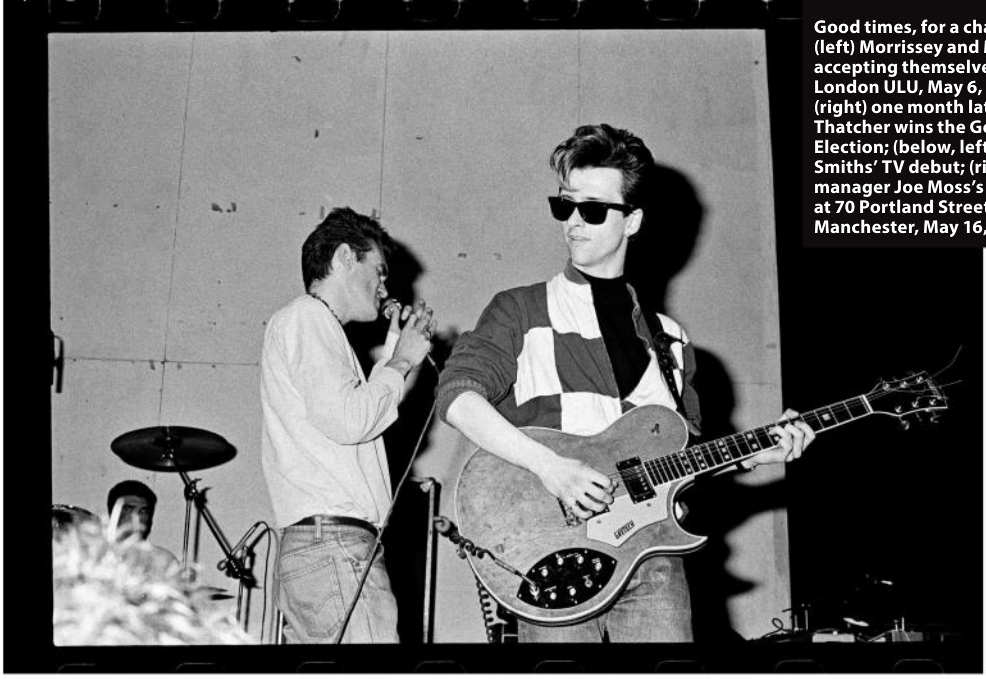
INCREDIBLY, IT HAD BEEN A MERE 13 MONTHS SINCE The Smiths played their debut show, on October 4, 1982, at The Ritz in Manchester, an event itself only five months after Steven Patrick Morrissey and John Martin Maher's subsequently mythologised 'first meeting' at the Morrissey family home in Stretford.

But, in fact, they'd already met, in the foyer of the Manchester Apollo in August 1978, at a Patti Smith show, when Morrissey was 19 and Marr about to turn 15. "Johnny first shoved his face in," the singer recalled, "and he said, 'You've got a funny voice.'"

Regarded in Manchester as an eccentric outsider, aspiring author and music journalist, but certainly not a lead singer, Morrissey had already tried out as the frontman of punk band The Nosebleeds. Marr, a prodigious guitarist since his early teens, was to go on to form new wave outfit White Dice and then funkateers Freak Party.

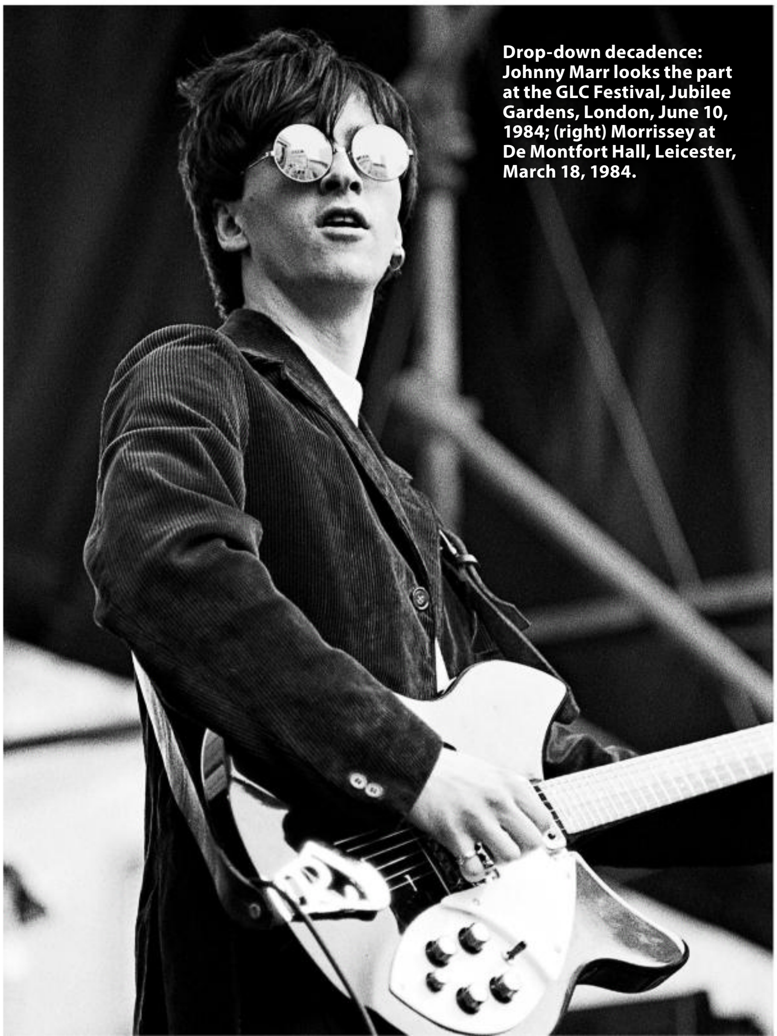
But both, ultimately, were lost musical souls, who found one another after ex-Nosebleeds (and future The Cult) guitarist Billy Duffy showed Marr some lyrics that Morrissey had written. As characters, Morrissey and Marr were very different – the former shy and circumspect, the latter an outgoing enthusiast – but proved to be a perfect fit.

Flicking through the singer's singles collection on the day ➢



Conservative Victory 9th June
Congratulations!
MAGGIE IN

Good times, for a change: (left) Morrissey and Marr accepting themselves at London ULU, May 6, 1983; (right) one month later, Thatcher wins the General Election; (below, left) The Smiths' TV debut; (right) in manager Joe Moss's office at 70 Portland Street, Manchester, May 16, 1983.



Drop-down decadence: Johnny Marr looks the part at the GLC Festival, Jubilee Gardens, London, June 10, 1984; (right) Morrissey at De Montfort Hall, Leicester, March 18, 1984.

Handsome devils: Freak Party's Johnny Marr and Simon Wolstencroft, 1982.

Courtesy Simon Wolstencroft, Getty (2) Andy Catlin

"THE ENERGY WAS JUST THERE, AND IT WAS RIGHT. AND WE WERE ALL LOOKING AT EACH OTHER, JUST GOING, 'FUCKING HELL.'" ANDY ROURKE

≺ of their May '82 reacquaintance, the guitarist was delighted to find a 45 of The Marvelettes' 1966 groover You're The One. The first complete song they wrote together the day after, The Hand That Rocks The Cradle, borrowed the chords from Patti Smith's Kimberly. From these and other seemingly disparate influences – Billy Fury, Marianne Faithfull, T. Rex, the New York Dolls – a unique musical form began to emerge.

Marr's approach to the guitar – an attempt to transcribe all the elements of elaborate Tamla arrangements onto one instrument – accounted for much of it. "I'd try to cover the strings, piano and anything else with my right hand," he explained, "trying to play the whole record on six strings."

However, the pair's first recording, made on Marr's TEAC Portastudio, was inauspicious. I Want A Boy For My Birthday, a 1963 B-side by female US R&B trio The Cookies, was covered in hushed and uncertain Velvet Underground ballad style. Original Smiths bassist Dale Hibbert, who played on this exploratory track, later claimed that "Johnny and Steven told me they had plans to launch themselves as a 'gay band'."

"A lot of my mates were gay guys who liked rock music," Marr would say later. "I liked the idea of us being a band that were saying things for the gay community."

Like-minded musicians were difficult to find. Simon Wolstencroft, Marr's drummer friend from Freak Party, played on the group's first professional demo (recorded at Decibel Studios in Manchester in the summer of '82), but baulked when asked to accompany Morrissey singing Suffer Little Children, his lament for the victims of the Moors murders.

"As soon as he came in on the first verse going, 'Over the moor, take me to the moor,' it grated with me," Wolstencroft recalled in his 2014 book, You Can Drum But You Can't Hide. "I didn't get it, whatsoever. I was just thinking, This is depressing."

The final line-up of The Smiths fell together almost randomly – punky drummer Mike Joyce auditioned while spaced on magic mushrooms; Marr's Freak Party bassist pal Andy Rourke found Morrissey quiet and strange and was wary. But as soon as the four first played together, rattling through the garagey Handsome Devil, they began grinning with delight at the noise they were making.

"It was like it wasn't me playing the bass… it was like I was possessed," Rourke later enthused. "The energy was just there, and it was right. And we were all looking at each other, just going, 'Fucking hell.'"

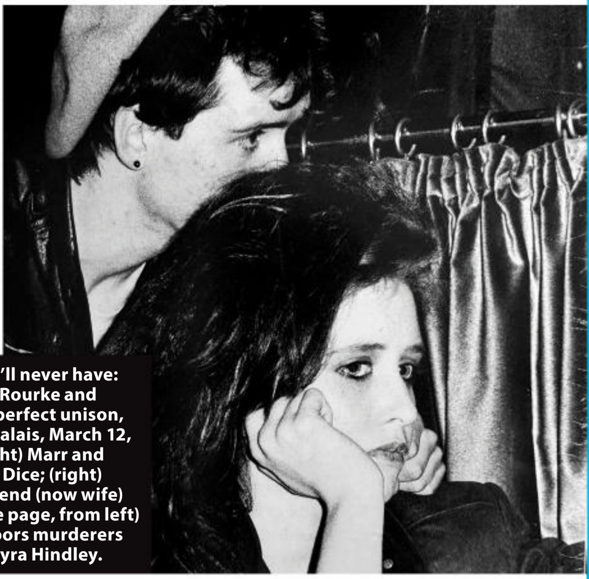
"It's a fantastic truth and a profound irony," Marr noted, "that the very first thing The Smiths did when they first got together was to start laughing uncontrollably."

"My brother came up to Manchester just when we started rehearsing at Crazy Face," Joyce tells MOJO today. "He said, 'What kind of music is it? Funk? Punk… folk… rock?' [I said], I don't know. I can't describe it."

EXISTING VIDEO FOOTAGE OF THE SMITHS' THIRD gig, at the Haçienda on February 4, 1983, reveals them already fully formed, visually and musically. The strident glam riffing of What Difference Does It Make?, second song in, is near note perfect. Even the gladioli – signifying Morrissey's professed desire to express "harmony with nature" – are in evidence.

That night, a recording of Handsome Devil, made through the live soundboard, was to provide the group with the B-side for their debut single, Hand In Glove, recorded three weeks after the Haçienda show at Strawberry Studios in Stockport and released in May on Rough Trade. Marr had boldly travelled to London and hustled a deal for a single from the indie label's boss, Geoff Travis.

"I didn't think this was going to be one of the most important groups ever," Travis reflected, "but I thought it was a great record."



Something they'll never have: (main pic) Andy Rourke and Johnny Marr in perfect unison, Hammersmith Palais, March 12, 1984; (above right) Marr and Rourke in White Dice; (right) Marr with girlfriend (now wife) Angie; (opposite page, from left) The Cookies; Moors murderers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley.

It was here, however, that The Smiths began what turned out to be a long struggle to recreate their live power on a debut LP. After inking an album deal with Travis in the summer of '83, they entered Elephant Studios in Wapping with former Teardrop Explodes guitarist Troy Tate acting as producer. Working-titled *The Hand That Rocks The Cradle*, it was a version ultimately scrapped.

Today, in leaked online form, it sounds not so greatly different to the final version of *The Smiths* – a bit messy in places, way too heavy on new-fangled digital reverb in others. In his memoir, Morrissey admitted that a key factor in the band's decision to bin it was the pressure of expectation. "It is not Troy's fault, but recording does not go well," he wrote, "and we all feel that we must have another shot at it in view of the goggle-eyed interest from the weekly music papers."

The Smiths had way more luck, in sonic terms, at the BBC. In a series of ostensibly live recordings that managed to capture their punchy wonder, the group's first session for John Peel's Radio 1 show in May '83 turned in assured versions of flirtatious ballad Reel Around The Fountain and the hyper-stimulated rockabilly of Miserable Lie.

"They've been touted slightly as the latest prophets of Northern doom," Peel offered in his introduction. "I should disregard that. At least you can judge for yourself on tonight's programme." (The session would be re-broadcast no less than five times in the next 18 months.)

But, bizarrely, in early September, the day that The Smiths' second Radio 1 session was due to be aired by DJ David 'Kid' Jensen, including a new recording of Handsome Devil, a sensationalist piece about the track by journalist Nick Ferrari appeared in The Sun newspaper under the blaring headline "'Ban Child-Sex Pop Song' Plea To Beeb". In it, Ferrari claimed that its lyric featured "clear references to picking up kids for sexual kicks" – in reference to the campy couplet, "A boy in the bush is worth two in the hand/I think I can help you get through your exams."

Morrissey was horrified by the tabloid's story. Ferrari had distorted the singer's lyric, whose homoerotic connotations were rather of the Carry On variety and didn't specify the ages of its protagonists. ➢

Courtesy Johnny Marr taken from the book Set The Boy Free (2), Paul Slattery

CHAMPION VERSION?

Was the 'Troy Tate tape' – The Smiths' first stab at a debut album – *really* better? Just about, reckons CHRIS CATCHPOLE.

IN JULY 1983, The Smiths entered Elephant Studios in London's Docklands to start work on their first album with Teardrop Explodes guitarist Troy Tate.

"Troy's vision was to capture the way the band sounded live. He thought it was important that the record represented the way we were in the clubs and was an authentic document," recalled Johnny Marr in 2016. "He worked pretty tirelessly to get passion from a performance and was very nurturing with me."

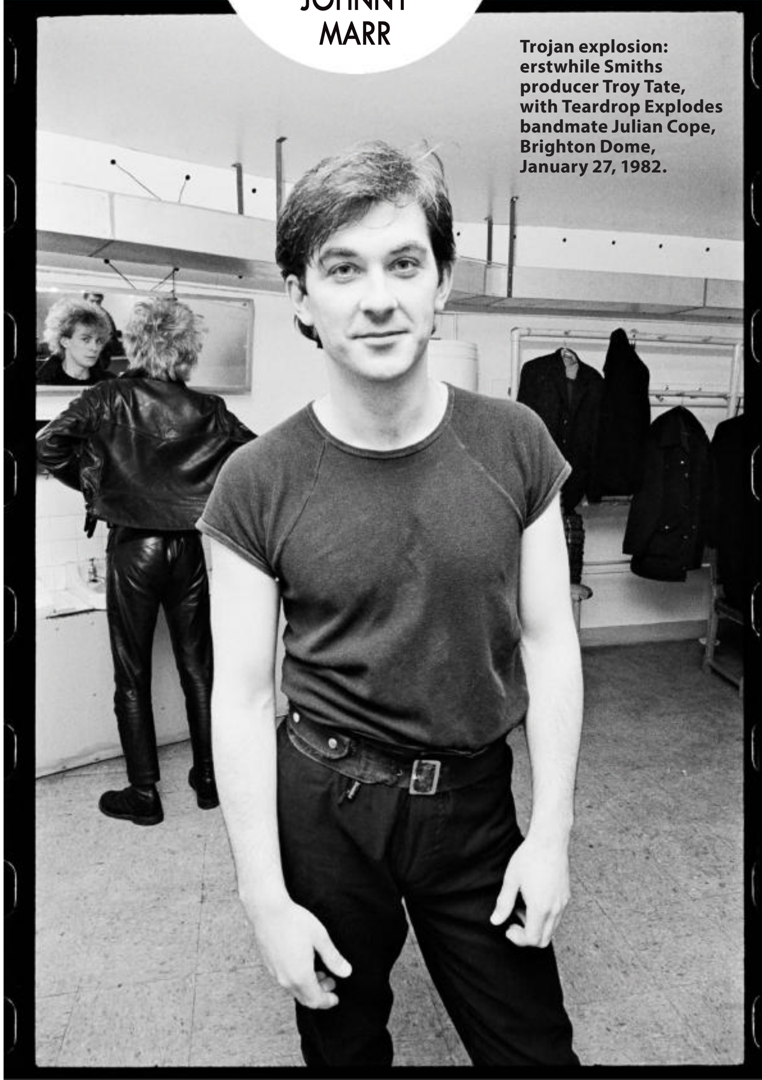
The band were initially buoyant about the sessions, with Morrissey telling Melody Maker, "We've done everything exactly right and it'll show." However, working in a basement studio during a heatwave there were problems keeping instruments in tune, and Rough Trade boss Geoff Travis was dismayed by the results, approaching John Porter to remix the 14 tracks Tate had cut. Porter declared them "out of tune and out of time" and instead volunteered to re-record the album from scratch. Travis, Morrissey and a hesitant Marr agreed, and Tate's sessions were scrapped.

Only the pounding Jeane would see an official release during the band's lifetime, as the B-side to This Charming Man that October, but the various bootlegs of the sessions give a rough impression of how Tate's album might have ended up.

Despite Porter's dismissals, the band largely sound in tune and on point, with an energy and bite mostly absent on Porter's versions. Notable, too, are some more adventurous production and arrangement choices: the hammering Jerry Lee Lewis-style piano added to Accept Yourself; the buzzsaw guitar and ghostly backing vocals that swirl around What Difference Does It Make?; the weeping cello and positively psychedelic backwards guitar and glockenspiel outro on Tate's take on Pretty Girls Make Graves, which would later surface as the B-side to the band's first post-split single, I Started Something I Couldn't Finish.

Despite the tantalising 'what-ifs' Troy Tate's sessions have sparked over the years, the iterations of songs recorded by Tate and Porter would soon be eclipsed by the far less arduously recorded, and arguably definitive, radio sessions on *Hatful Of Hollow* the following year.

"TROY'S VISION WAS TO CAPTURE THE WAY THE BAND SOUNDED LIVE."
JOHNNY MARR



Trojan explosion: erstwhile Smiths producer Troy Tate, with Teardrop Explodes bandmate Julian Cope, Brighton Dome, January 27, 1982.

< "I can't understand why anybody should write such a thing about us," a bruised Morrissey responded. "We must stress that Handsome Devil is aimed entirely towards adults and has nothing to do with children, and certainly nothing to do with child molesting. It's an adult understanding of quite intimate matters."

"That report in The Sun," Rourke later recalled in Simon Goddard's Smiths book Songs That Saved Your Life, "that killed me when that came out, but it was worse for our parents, just because of the implications of it. We all had to warn our families. I had to tell my grandparents and try and explain it to them. It was mortifying."

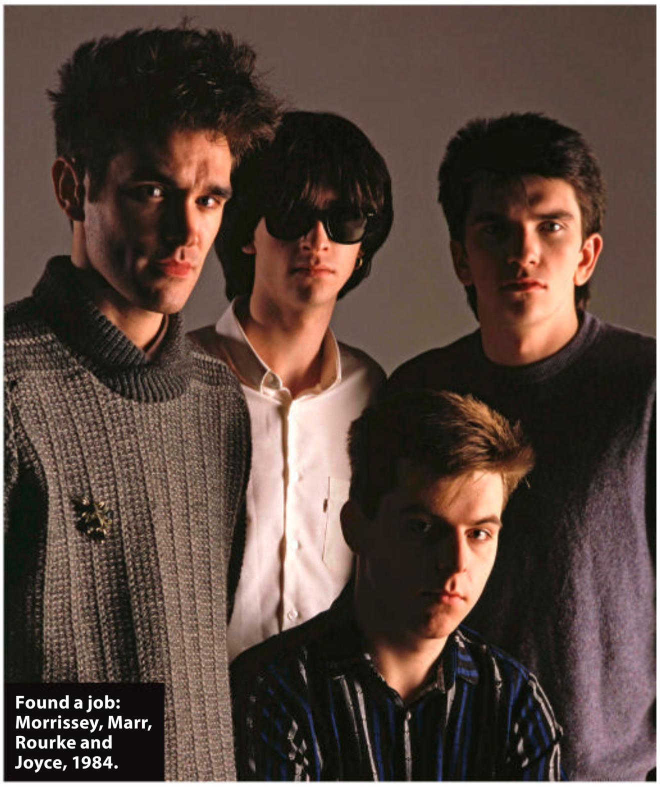
Less overtly sexual, more intangibly lascivious, This Charming Man was knocked into shape by the band's new producer John Porter and issued as The Smiths' second single in October '83. Porter – a friend of Bryan Ferry's from Newcastle University who'd played bass on Roxy Music's second album, *For Your Pleasure* – first met The Smiths when working as an engineer on sessions at the BBC. "They had this sort of cult following in Manchester," he remembers now. "I quickly struck up a friendship with Johnny. Musically, they were just a three-piece band… guitar, bass and drums. Y'know, on-stage where it's all noisy and Morrissey's running around with gladioli up his bum or whatever, that gives you a certain impression of things."

In the studio, notes Porter, the stakes are always higher: "It's a cold situation and everything can be analysed. They didn't write traditionally structured songs. I did quite a lot of rearrangement of things."

Soon after their initial meeting, Porter agreed to produce their debut album, but remained aware that the band's exploding popularity was a double-edged sword. This was a hugely anticipated record by an unconventional band yet to establish a sonic template. "It was an interesting conundrum," says Porter, "how to present them."

ESSENTIALLY A BAND WITH THE SONIC VALUES OF the '60s and '70s stuck with the recording fashions and technology of the early 1980s, The Smiths often seemed stranded in the wrong era, one of gated drums, "clicky" bass sounds and thin guitars.

More problematically, the budget for their debut album was already depleted by the abandoned Troy Tate recordings. John Porter's first step was to take the band into Matrix Studios, a dingy but affordable basement facility close to the British Museum. "It was a sweatbox and I worked there a lot," he says. "There wasn't anything intimidating about Matrix. Y'know, you didn't really want to lie on the carpets or anything (*laughs*). But I just wanted somewhere where the guys could feel like they were virtually in a rehearsal room."



Found a job: Morrissey, Marr, Rourke and Joyce, 1984.

"I REMEMBER AT ONE POINT, I SUGGESTED A LYRIC CHANGE. WELL, THAT NEARLY GOT ME FIRED WITHIN MINUTES."

JOHN PORTER

One early breakthrough for Porter and The Smiths was the recording of What Difference Does It Make?. Its multiplicity of guitar overdubs became a theme for Marr and the producer.

"It had that sort of R&B-ish kind of riff Johnny was doing," Porter says. "But that for two-and-a-half, three minutes, without any embellishments, was very empty. So we built it up. It had quite a few guitars on it. They were a bit like horn riffs or, in some cases, what backing vocals would do. The band didn't want any other musicians particularly, or any keyboards. So we had to create the impression of all these things with guitars, in order to add dynamics to the tune."

Remarkably, the bulk of the recordings that ended up on *The Smiths* were subsequently cut at Pluto Studios in Manchester within a five-day working week.

"There was very little time," the producer stresses. "Some of the things that they did, I had very little to do with in terms of arrangement. Suffer Little Children, for instance, which I thought was a great track, I didn't have much to do with. Whereas other ones I sort of tinkered around with. Of course, with their approval… with *Johnny's* approval. Morrissey didn't take that much interest, when I was there, in the musical side of it. If Johnny dug something, Morrissey generally went along with it."

At the end of the week, Porter remembers an eleventh hour panic. "We got all the tracks down by Thursday afternoon, and then we listened to them in the control room. About three-quarters of the album I didn't think was good enough. So, we re-recorded pretty much the whole album on Thursday evening and Friday morning."

Morrissey's vocal takes were the least pored-over elements. "If he felt that he'd done what he wanted to do, that was it," says Porter. "I mean, he'd sort of ask me, 'Is that OK?' But if I said anything other than, 'Yes,' he wasn't that interested. I remember at one point, I suggested a lyric change. Well, that nearly got me fired within minutes."

The final overdubs and the mixing of the album were completed at Eden Studios in west London. Paul Carrack, the former Ace vocalist who was at the time the keyboardist in Squeeze, was brought in by Porter to play organ and piano on three tracks (adding characterful embellishments, especially, to Reel Around The Fountain). But Carrack sensed that his presence wasn't entirely welcomed by The Smiths' singer.

"Morrissey was there kind of brooding away in the corner of the control room with his glasses on," Carrack laughs now. "He didn't say an awful lot. I did some Hammond organ and he said it sounded a bit like 'Reginald Dixon on acid.'"

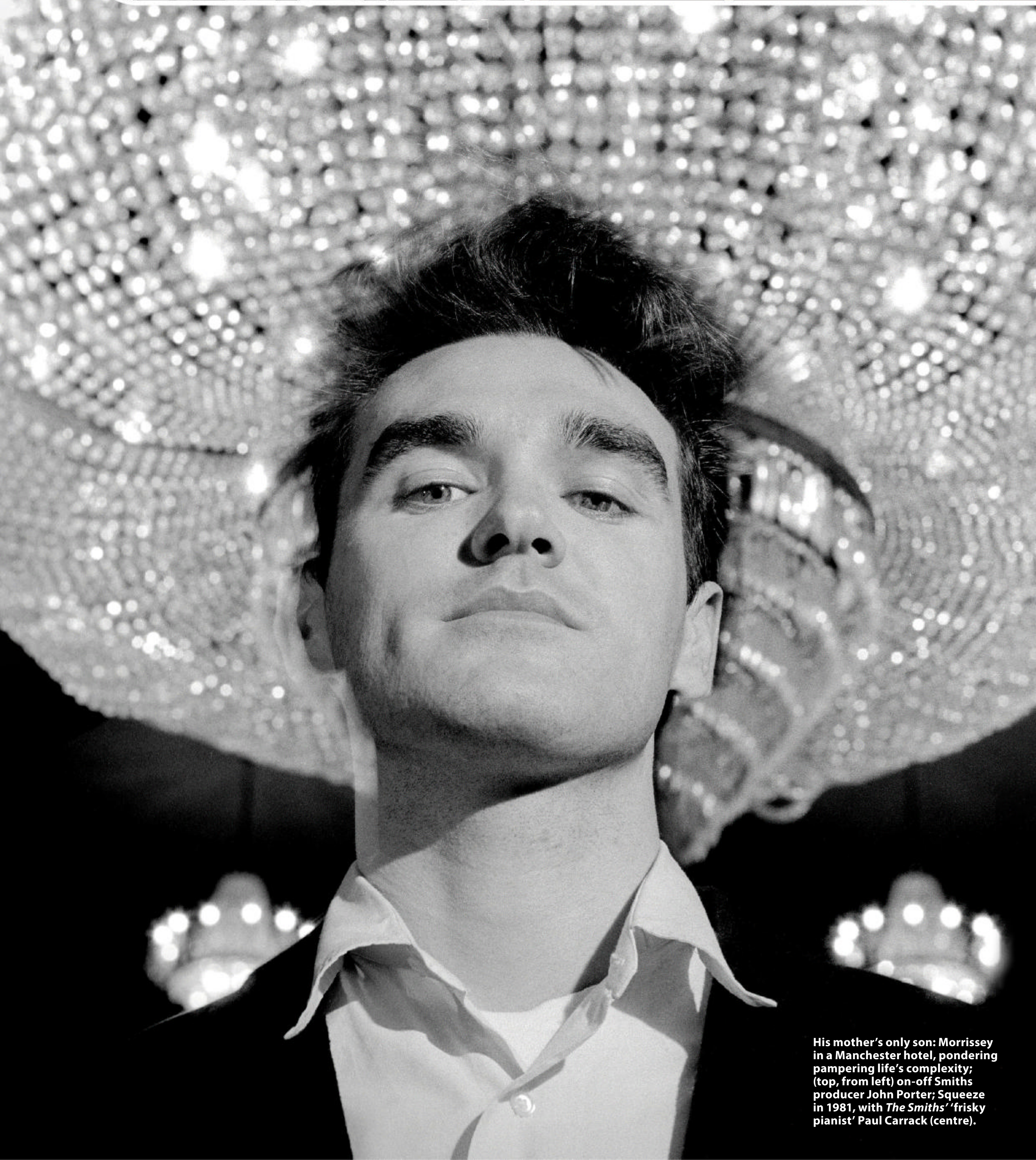
Dixon was the hugely popular in-house organist at Blackpool's Tower Ballroom from 1930, and a byword for kitsch in UK pop culture well into the '60s and beyond.

"I never knew whether that was meant as a compliment or what," Carrack adds. "I tried to take it as a compliment."

In his book, Morrissey revealed his true feelings about Carrack's parts, damning his "frisky piano" and deciding Reel Around The Fountain in this form sounded "more caper than lamentation".

"I thought Reel Around The Fountain was the best song," declares Porter, "and I never thought we nailed it. It sounded ➢

Photoshot/Topfoto, Courtesy John Porter, Camera Press/Barry Marsden, Getty



His mother's only son: Morrissey in a Manchester hotel, pondering pampering life's complexity; (top, from left) on-off Smiths producer John Porter; Squeeze in 1981, with *The Smiths'* 'frisky pianist' Paul Carrack (centre).

NOT LIKE ANY OTHER LOVE...

The Smiths' first flush of genius, annotated by MOJO's staff.

HAND IN GLOVE

(single, 1983)

The Smiths
HAND IN GLOVE

Its subject Morrissey and Marr's own partnership, Hand In Glove was The Smiths' manifesto. Marr finessed the Stooges-inspired riff while his girlfriend Angie frantically drove him to Morrissey's house to get it down on tape lest he forget it. The singer would declare that "everything I did before Hand In Glove was simply working towards it." *CC*

HANDSOME DEVIL

(B-side to Hand In Glove, 1983)

Morrissey's famed "celibate cries" are belied by the bestial sexuality surging through this tale of carnal corruption in scholarly rooms. Recorded at the Haçienda in February '83 (only their third ever gig), it captures the ferocity of the band's early live shows, Marr's gothic shards crashing over a relentless assault from Joyce and Rourke. *CC*

THIS CHARMING MAN

(single, 1983)

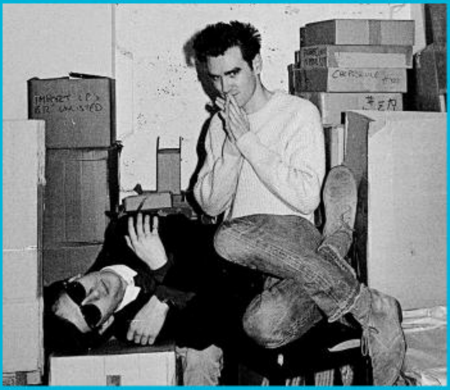
Baroquabilly, anyone? How else to describe this rush of effervescent rhythm and spangling guitar? Meanwhile, "punctured bicycle, on a hillside, desolate…" sets the scene like a kitchen-sink script and the subsequent *mélange* of foiled passion and withering wryness defines Smithsness. Morrissey's yelps at 1:05 and 2:03 in the single version are, in themselves, iconic. *DE*

JEANE

(B-side, This Charming Man, 1983)

In one of two Troy Tate productions to have escaped from the vaults, a stamping band let off fireworks – hear that Rourke bass twang – as a butch, slightly flat Mozzer broods on domestic misery, sexual ambiguity (is it about Linder Sterling?) and a dreadful, unrevealed secret. Morrissey and Marr also recorded it with Sandie Shaw, but let's not mention the Billy Bragg version. *IH*

Happy in the haze: The Smiths, Manchester Central Station, May 16, 1983; (top) Morrissey and Marr in Rough Trade's store room, 1983.



WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

(single, 1984)

The Smiths' third single interpolated a lyric cribbed from Shelagh Delaney and a chiming blues riff from Marr, inspired by Jo Jo Gunne's 1972 boogie rocker Run Run Run. The band's TOTP performance in January '84, Morrissey – hearing aid wire dangling from his ear and gladioli protruding from his back pocket – further implanted himself in the pop consciousness. *CC*

REEL AROUND THE FOUNTAIN

(from Hatful Of Hollow, 1984)

Pop likes its sex simple – another convention The Smiths upended. Against a languorous Marr, this crypto-ballad unfolds in a confusion of febrile POVs, with "You can pin and mount me, like a butterfly" the most startling. The May '83, John Peel take, scrappier but gutsier, more desperate, and in a higher key, shades the keyboard-assisted version on *The Smiths*. *DE*

YOU'VE GOT EVERYTHING NOW

(from The Smiths, 1984)

To a sudden guitar attack in a leg-brace, a baleful *j'accuse* against someone who was dominated, and possibly fancied, in school, who has now ascended to well-adjusted adulthood – affording maximum blame, self-pity and resentment, the quintessential Morrissey pleasure zone. Works as a trenchant diagnosis of the singer in 2023: "What a terrible mess I've made of my life." *IH*

BACK TO THE OLD HOUSE

(from Hatful Of Hollow, 1984)

Forget the oddly pat full-band recording from the B-side of What Difference Does It Make?: this September '83 Peel recording finds Marr playing an orchestra on acoustic folk guitar as Morrissey cuts to the core of aloneness, memory, self-entrapment and missed chances, too aware that what means everything to you can be zero to someone else. The saddest they ever got. *IH*

STILL ILL

(from Hatful Of Hollow, 1984)

Mordantly comic, this defining statement of entitlement and disdain – "England is mine and it owes me a living" – portrays illness/hypochondria as catch-all mind-state (is it sexuality? Depression? Chronic outsiderdom? Don't ask him, he'll die) to a gold-standard Marr riff and melody. As is often the case, the BBC session beats the debut album version. *IH*

HEAVEN KNOWS I'M MISERABLE NOW

(single, 1984)

Look past the literal statement of the narrator's *Weltschmerz*, at the camply-raised eyebrow of "Heaven *knows*…" and hark to Marr's jazzy-sunny chords, redolent of the "happy haze" in which we begin, and it's clear: not all Morrissey's moaning and groaning was to be taken at face value. It's song as secret smile, saved for the cognoscenti. *DE*

GIRL AFRAID

(B-side, Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now, 1984)

A rockabilly warning from darkest Manchester, with guitars that leave phantom trails. Morrissey writes in the third person (something he would soon renounce) of the impossibility of coupledom, communication and real understanding. Picture the young Moz, sat and staring in the room downstairs, as his lifelong need for vengeance begins to stir. *IH*

ACCEPT YOURSELF

(from Hatful Of Hollow, 1984)

A soul beat, maximum heady jangle and an insight that seems simple enough – accept yourself with all your imperfections, and then you can really begin to live. Of course, it's not that simple, and the final repeated, "When?" falls heavily. The singer and his audience are still waiting to find out. *IH*

WILLIAM, IT WAS REALLY NOTHING

(single, 1984)

The third of three killer singles in eight months, each revealing new dimensions to the band. Marr's riff is like light pouring through a stained-glass window. Morrissey underlines that if what he has to say won't fit in a bar line, he'll break it. And amid the flippancy, the dark threat of a bad marriage in a place you hate. *DE*

PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE, LET ME GET WHAT I WANT

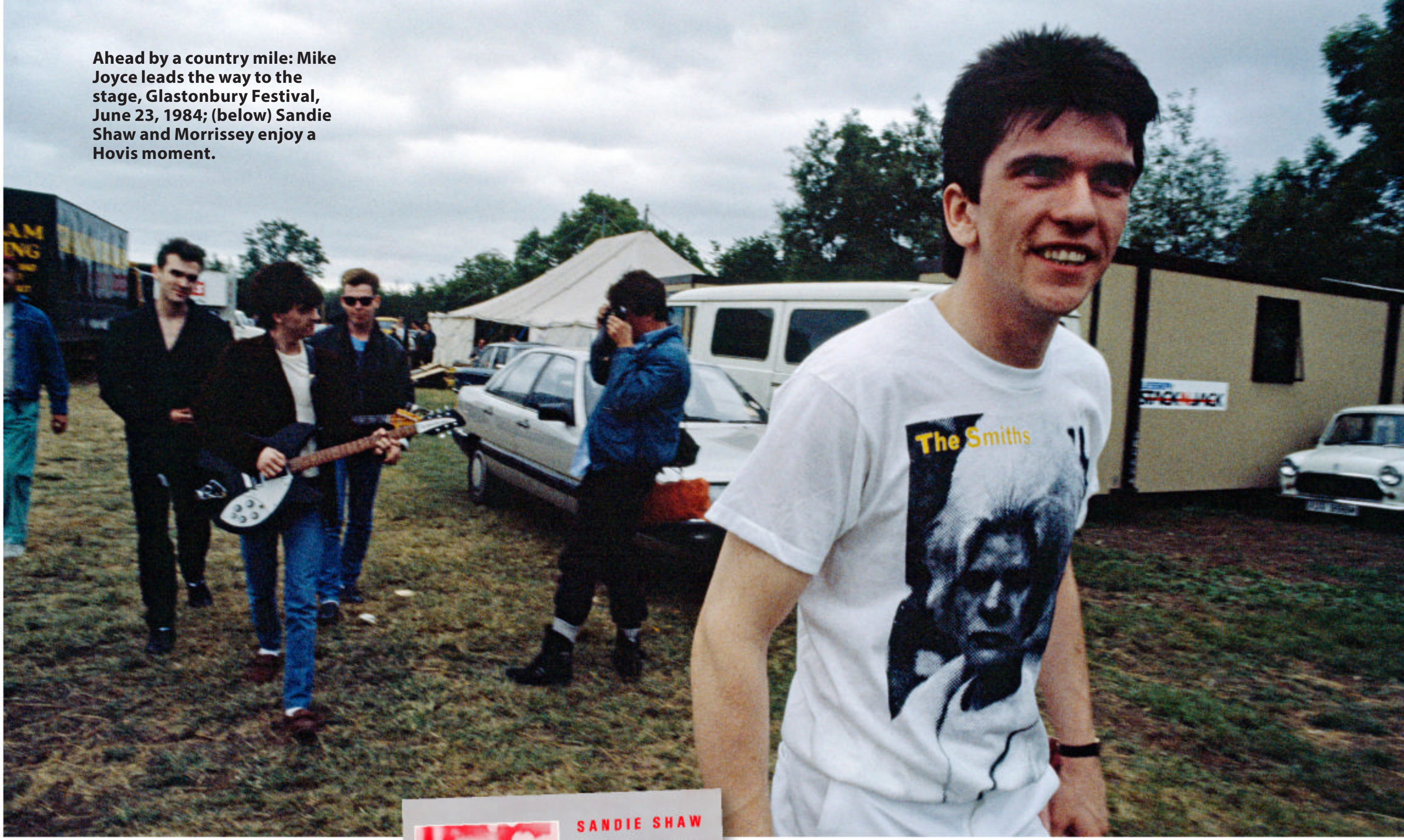
(B-side to William, It Was Really Nothing, 1984)

Lasting just one minute and 52 seconds, the perfect distillation of The Smiths' capability for yearning beauty, as Morrissey pleads for the love he so desperately craves over an aching chord sequence from Marr. Where one might expect another verse, instead comes an *even more beautiful* mandolin solo. Nothing more needs to be said. *CC*

HOW SOON IS NOW?

(B-side to William, It Was Really Nothing, 1984)

How Soon's route to the public – B-side, to *Hatful* track, to A-side – was as circuitous as Marr's famous tremolo guitar part. Yet its torrid near-seven minutes (four-ish on the single edit) is the band's genre-transcending bid for immortality, while Morrissey – with every reason to crow – never sounded more crushed: "And all my hope is gone…" *DE*



Ahead by a country mile: Mike Joyce leads the way to the stage, Glastonbury Festival, June 23, 1984; (below) Sandie Shaw and Morrissey enjoy a Hovis moment.

< sparse. Plus, it wasn't a great feel. The drums weren't great…"

In the end, no one involved in its creation seems to have been entirely happy with *The Smiths*. Later, Morrissey would describe it as "pasty and thin".

"I was quite disappointed by the sound of the first album," says Mike Joyce today. "I prefer Troy Tate's version of the album that was never released. The one that John Porter did, it just doesn't capture what we could do."

SANDIE SHAW
HAND IN GLOVE

THE SUPPOSED SONIC SHORTCOMings of The Smiths' records didn't diminish their impact. As 1984 began with What Difference Does It Make? at Number 12 in the UK chart, followed by the album hitting Number 2, the band were a fast-accelerating cultural phenomenon – a magnetic draw for music fans alienated from the UK mainstream. In the group's image, the quiff once again became king.

"You'd literally take a photograph of Morrissey to the barber," Radiohead's Ed O'Brien recalled to this writer of his Smiths-fan teens, "and say I want it like *that*."

"The exhilaration is bracing," Morrissey noted of this phase of the band's rise, "since we are very much apart from any previous factions and actions, trailing no one, and very much our own campaign."

It was a campaign that sometimes went directly from triumph to calamity. The band's American debut show, at New York's Danceteria, on New Year's Eve '83, saw Morrissey, without his spectacles and suffering from what he later described as "blindness and bewilderment", fall off stage in front of Manhattan's hipsters. The best thing about the New York trip ended up being the red 1959 Gibson 335 guitar that Seymour Stein, the boss of The Smiths' US label Sire, generously gifted Johnny Marr.

"I carried it back to the Iroquois Hotel on West 44th Street," Marr recalled. "I took [it] out of its old, beat-up case, and with the very first thing I played I wrote our next single, Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now, then the B-side, Girl Afraid. That's what happens with some instruments. They already have music inside them."

"WE WERE RIGHT BANG IN THE CENTRE OF THE '80s, BUT WE DIDN'T BELONG IN THE '80s."
MIKE JOYCE

Back in the UK in May, Heaven Knows… – recorded with Porter at Island Records' Fallout Shelter Studio in Hammersmith, west London – took The Smiths into the Top 10 of the singles chart. But for all that their records now blared from car radios and were blasted in clubs (their beat-heavy singles revealing themselves as dancefloor fillers, with would-be Morrisseys competing to perfect the singer's one-legged twist), The Smiths were polarising, and there were many who hated them. Some even lambasted them as nouveau hippies, given the feyness and the flowers.

"The hippy thing is entirely monotonous," Morrissey complained to ZigZag's William Shaw in February 1984. "I'm just really tired of the whole thing. They look no further than the flowers and say, 'Aha! Hippydom! It couldn't possibly be anything else.' Anything trivial like that simply bores us to death."

Even the access to his former idols that fame now allowed him seemed to slightly irritate the singer. Sandie Shaw, signed to Rough Trade, would front a new version of Hand In Glove, released as a single (Number 27 in May '83) backed by The Smiths, *sans* Morrissey. Although the frontman had in fact determinedly wooed Shaw, he was comically withering about their initial encounter, when she offered him a piece of toast and gave him "an eye-squintingly small Hovis-type slice… cold… minus a plate or a napkin."

In Shaw's mind, working with The Smiths was her way of putting some cool distance between herself and her '60s contemporaries. "I find the way that many of them have handled success is disappointing," she said. "I suppose that's why I'm here at Rough Trade and they're staring at their reflections in the pool.

"I'm chuffed that I've trusted myself to do this," she emphasised. "Can you imagine someone like Lulu doing it?" ➢

Paul Slattery (2), ANL/Shutterstock, Getty

I hate students
COME ON BEAKER
P.I.L

Glad all over: Morrissey inspects the rider backstage at Norwich UEA, February 14, 1984.

Paul Slattery

> “THE HIPPY THING IS ENTIRELY MONOTONOUS. THEY LOOK NO FURTHER THAN THE FLOWERS AND SAY, ‘AHA! HIPPYDOM!”
>
> **MORRISSEY**

FOR THE SMITHS THEMSELVES, THERE HAD ALREADY been a significant development – one that was to change the course of their recording career. Back in March, while helping to record Heaven Knows I’m Miserable Now, the in-house engineer at the Fallout Shelter had made a strong impression on Morrissey.

“He was shy and receptive and three thoughts ahead of every situation,” the singer later stated. “Technically masterful and very patient.”

For his part, Stephen Street now tells MOJO, “I was super impressed by Morrissey. His vocal delivery on that session was incredible. You didn’t have to do many takes to get the vocal you needed.”

Street was mindful that Porter was still, for now, The Smiths’ producer, but he was flattered by the attention.

“I was trying to be as efficient and as helpful as I could be to John,” he insists. “But at the end of that three-day session Johnny and Morrissey said they’d enjoyed [it] and they wanted to take my number.”

The band’s interest in Street was not lost on Porter. “By the end of the session, I thought that the writing was on the wall for me,” he laughs. “I could see Morrissey had more of a relationship with Stephen already than he did with me.”

By now, Morrissey and Marr had both moved to London (Kensington and Earl’s Court respectively) and were pursuing very different interests. For the guitarist, cocaine had entered the picture. “It’s a great drug for wasting lots of time, words and money,” he later decided, “especially if you’re a 20-year-old pop star with a penchant for staying up all night and wearing sunglasses indoors.”

John Porter’s last stand with The Smiths (for the moment: he would return in 1986 for singles Panic and Ask) was to be a giant creative leap forward. Three days at Jam Studios in Finsbury Park, north London were to produce a triptych of tracks that revealed previously unseen possibilities for the band: the shimmering, elasticated William, It Was Really Nothing, the *cri de coeur* ballad Please Please Please Let Me Get What I Want, and the *sui generis* How Soon Is Now?.

Murky, desolate, yet groovy, the latter sounded like nothing The Smiths had done before (or would do in the future). Marr remembered its origin being a “swampy blues” track he’d experimented with at home in Earl’s Court: a trancey riff and two-note phrase played over a drum machine beat.

At Jam, ahead of recording the track, Porter, Marr, Rourke and Joyce altered the studio atmosphere by screwing red bulbs into the light fittings and getting busy with the Rizlas. (“We did smoke a lot of dope,” Porter chuckles.) The result was a hypnotically rolling groove, driven by stereo tremolo guitars and topped with an eerie slide motif. The near seven-minute-long How Soon Is Now? was to be The Smiths’ most psychedelic moment, rendered all the more powerful by Morrissey’s alienated lyric and desperate vocal delivery.

“I thought that was a breakthrough for me with The Smiths,” Porter says. “Because we’d broken out of that two-and-a-half minute, jingly jangly kind of thing. But I got fired after How Soon Is Now? because Geoff [Travis] said it didn’t sound like the band any more. He said I was having too much influence.”

AND SO, WHEN THE SMITHS RECONVENED IN autumn 1984 for the making of their second album, it was without Porter, and with the band self-producing, aided by Stephen Street at the console. Meanwhile, in November came a stopgap release that has since loomed large in Smiths lore.

Hatful Of Hollow gathered together the Radio 1 sessions and recent singles and B-sides, retailed at a maximum of £3.99 (a pound cheaper than the average LP at the time) and reached Number 7, before staying on the UK albums chart for 46 weeks. In many minds, including their singer’s, it remains the more accurate representation of the early Smiths. Morrissey viewed it as “an interim collection that might hopefully detain those scared off by the blunted thud of *The Smiths*.”

The band were now on a creative and commercial roll. “There was an excitement,” says Stephen Street, “because I think they knew they were riding a wave. They were working incredibly hard at this time. They were either recording singles in-between albums, or on the road touring. They just didn’t stop. They were just like a machine in top gear – cruising along really well.”

More of a pessimist might have wondered if Marr and Morrissey’s differing opinions on Porter boded well for future intra-band harmony: “I knew there was this pull starting between Morrissey and Johnny,” Porter reflects today. But in all other respects they appeared set fair, busy creating their own parallel world within a hostile decade. That determination would burgeon on the in-progress *Meat Is Murder* with songs that took aim at the status quo while declaring solidarity with all who felt sad or stymied, and then bloom on 1986’s imperial *The Queen Is Dead* and 1987’s valedictory *Strangeways, Here We Come*. The most remarkable British band of the mid ’80s, and the reason that some of the best British bands of the following decade – Radiohead, Oasis and Suede included – came to be, were men out of place and out of time.

Recently, Mike Joyce picked up a Best Of The ’80s compilation and found that not one Smiths song was on it.

“I took [that as] a massive compliment,” he tells MOJO. “Because we were right bang in the centre of the ’80s, but we didn’t belong in the ’80s. We weren’t an ’80s-sounding band. We just sounded like The Smiths and nothing else.”

NINA SIMONE
A SONG FOR LEON
A TRIBUTE TO LEON RUSSELL
BETTY DAVIS
THEY SAY I'M DIFFERENT
The Coral
Sea of Mirrors
CORINNE BAILEY RAE
BLACK
ALABASTER
COME
JAMMYS
Presents
ALICE COOPER
ROAD

MOJO FILTER

YOUR GUIDE TO THE MONTH'S BEST MUSIC

EDITED BY **JENNY BULLEY** jenny.bulley@bauermedia.co.uk

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> "A vocal as furious as her hammer-on-anvil piano… driving Newport wild with just a beat."
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On further reflection

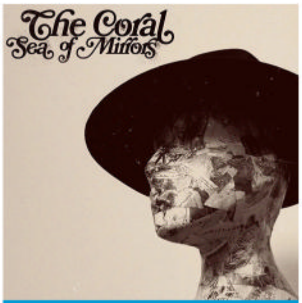
Wirral wanderers set the existential scene on cinematic double bill.
By **Victoria Segal**. Illustration by **Joe Wilson**.

The Coral

★★★★

Sea Of Mirrors

RUN ON. CD/DL/LP



"ONCE A DRIFTER, always a drifter," declares guest narrator John Simm on Drifter's Prayer, a track from *Holy Joe's Coral Island Medicine Show*, the companion LP to The Coral's eleventh album, *Sea Of Mirrors*. "Those are the rules of the game." From the moment their self-titled 2002 debut unfurled its sails with buccaneering opener Spanish Main, The Coral made it difficult to pin down what their game was, let alone its rules, jamming the signals that might have fixed their exact coordinates. They launched their voyage from the Wirral seaside town of Hoylake while they were still in their teens but otherwise, these "bedroom heads" (in the words of multi-instrumentalist Nick Power) roved all over the map, their fondness for Love, Can and Captain Beefheart mutating into pirate psychedelic reels, beat group freak-outs and wistful garage pop.

> "Unsettled tracks about love and loss, physical and mental alienation, disconnection from the world."

While they are no stranger to the concept album – 2004's *Nightfreak And The Sons Of Becker* was Boris Becker-themed psychedelia recorded in career-sabotaging response to the Number 1 success of the previous year's *Magic And Medicine* – the band have recently become increasingly fond of carving out strange metaphorical spaces to furnish with their work. With their last album, 2021's *Coral Island*, they wrote a collection of songs about a haunted coastal resort, binding them together with narration from Ian 'The Great Muriarty' Murray, grandfather of singer James Skelly and his drummer brother Ian. Now, they are following that double album with two records released on the same day – *Sea Of Mirrors*, and the physical-formats-only country feedback of *Holy Joe's Coral Island Medicine Show*, a record again hooked together by Murray's late-night beatnik radio links.

BACK STORY: DOUBLE FEATURE

- "We did a double album last time so we couldn't do it again," laughs James Skelly, explaining why *Sea Of Mirrors* and *Holy Joe's Coral Island Medicine Show* are being released simultaneously. Tom Waits's 2002 double-header *Blood Money* and *Alice* was inspiration; the decision to release the *Coral Island* spin-off on physical formats only, though, appealed to the band's inner teenage tape-swappers: "Like that cult thing, when you find an album that you can't get on streaming and share it with your mates. You'd hope it would become something like that one day."

It's an oddly inappropriate burst of creative energy, given *Sea Of Mirrors* is so much about drift, dissipation, the deceptive cracks and crevices between solid reality and incorporeal fantasy. Barnacled shanties give way to more cosmic voyages; Faraway Worlds is less a desperado rampage to the Spanish main, more a harmony-laden trip on David Crosby's schooner. The slow-moving Dream River, inviting the listener to pick out images and moods like a kind of psychic hook-a-duck, begins with a swell of strings reminiscent of Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley's Pure Imagination: *Sea Of Mirrors* seeks to be a world of The Coral's creation, one that might well defy all explanation. If it's formed around a worryingly played-out concept – the soundtrack for a film that doesn't exist, in this case a film about an actor on a disintegrating spaghetti western, slowly collapsing along with the sets – there is a depth to these songs that ensures *Sea Of Mirrors* isn't just so much postmodern plywood.

These waters are not entirely uncharted: *Coral Island* features a vignette called The End Of The Pier, which had Murray pulling back the curtain on the summer-season artifice: "Like all the great mirages, it's gone before you've blinked/The promenade palm trees are plastic, the amusements are a cardboard movie set." Melancholy, meanwhile, has long been their close companion (even on apparently jaunty hit In The Morning, love is being erased – "She wrote my name on a red telephone box/When I got there she'd already rubbed it off"). Yet *Sea Of Mirrors* is beautifully constructed, the band working with The High Llamas/Stereolab's Sean O'Hagan again (he also joined them on 2010's *Butterfly House*) to ensure a meticulous dovetail-joint finish to the surreal *Cowboy In Sweden* fantasia – a slight glassy glint to the string arrangements and choral cascades, but nothing cheap, no wobbly *trompe l'oeil* props.

It begins with The Actor And The Cardboard Cowboy, a misty instrumental that feels like the introduction to an Oliver Postgate children's show, a portal into these songs, before Cycles Of The Seasons, turn-turn-turns somewhere between Windmills Of Your Mind and the teatime melancholy of The Littlest Hobo theme tune. The cactus-needle guitars and rattlesnake drums of Wild Bird and North Wind are most obviously in wide-brimmed Sergio Leone character; a female figure flits ambiguously through That's Where She Belongs, The Way You Are (an acid-age And I Love Her) and dreamy instrumental intermission Eleanor.

The acting world isn't just represented by Simm's presence on *Holy Joe's Coral Island Medicine Show*, either. Cillian Murphy, currently operating in a slightly un-Coral-like universe post-Oppenheimer, delivers the closing Nick Power-written voiceover on Oceans Apart, his character balancing at the eroded edge of reality: "Here I am caught between both the form and the reflection, between fact and fiction/Not knowing what role I'm supposed to be playing."

"Most of the directors just used the genre," James Skelly tells MOJO, explaining his interest in spaghetti westerns, "they didn't really care about westerns – they would use it to make a horror film or a comedy or a political film." Similarly, the cinematic trappings of *Sea Of Mirrors* feel like a red herring, a Hitchcockian MacGuffin – the framing story of a film-set meltdown an excuse for a collection of unsettled tracks about love and loss, physical and mental alienation, disconnection from the world. Waves turn into desert sand, and vice versa; there is a constant blurred horizon. There's an occasional vagueness, but more often it translates into unease. The lushly stringed psychodrama of the title track imagines "a reflection of yourself/Reaching out for help", while a dangerous fog rolls in with the reverb on Oceans Apart as Skelly sings: "Feel myself slipping away/It's like a stranger took my place."

For all the drifting, though, it's rare that The Coral let these songs get away from them. They might have needed the cinematic prompt as a spur, a reminder of earlier unpasteurised idiosyncrasies, but *Sea Of Mirrors* stands up without the set dressing. It ends with a brief reprise of the opening track, gently lighting the aisles to the exits; you might well find yourself staying put in the dark, ready to let it run back to the start and play out again.

JAMES SPEAKS! SKELLY ON HIS LOVE OF LOVE, WESTERNS AND THEME TUNES.

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Pulpy love: James Skelly gets into the mood.

“I miss soundtracks with a theme song.”

James Skelly speaks to Victoria Segal.

You’ve talked about intra-band tape swapping and home-made compilations – was there a similar mood board for these records?

“*Holy Joe* was our version of making a country album. The other one, this guy was making a spaghetti western horror and he wanted us to do the soundtrack, but he couldn’t really quite get the budget. And then that set the idea off, really. I like the idea of a soundtrack like Midnight Cowboy, where it would have a theme tune you could remember. A lot of the soundtracks now are quite drone-y or moody – and they’re great – but I do miss those ones where you’d have a theme song, like Everybody’s Talking. It’s not really about the film literally – it’s just got the mood of the film. Or the Littlest Hobo song off the series, I like that. Even the Ennio Morricone ones have got hooks in that you remember.”

There are a few outlaws and drifters on the records – is that how you see the band?

“I don’t think we fit in anywhere, but I suppose everyone thinks that of themselves. I’ve always loved pulpy stuff; books, comics, and a lot of the time it’s because I’m projecting what I want it to be onto it. A lot of times, songs are just a mood that you have and you just keep chipping away until you capture that mood. Like once you get to 43 and you’ve got kids, you’d have to keep creating situations for yourself to try and write *Blood On The Tracks*, if you know what I mean.”

You worked with Sean O’Hagan (Microdisney, High Llamas, Stereolab) on the record – what did he bring to the process?

“We have our own language, but Sean knows all the reference points and he puts you on to about five films and a load of music you’ve never heard. Like, I’d never heard [Brazilian musician] Arthur Verocai. We were talking about using a harp and I’d never seen [Powell and Pressburger’s 1950 film] Gone To Earth, where her dad plays the harp on the moors. It’s brilliant. It’s sort of like Kate Bush’s whole back catalogue in one film.”

How did you persuade Johnny Echols of Love to read the sleevenotes for the bonus flexi-disc?

“We’re big Love fans and I was listening to Rick Rubin’s podcast and he was talking to Johnny Echols and his voice is like one of the old Hollywood, jazzy voices. I could hear him reading that whole thing; we just asked him and he said, ‘Yeah’. I don’t even know if he’s ever heard of us. We put some reverb on it, it sounded great. If you hear that or you read the notes first, you kind of get what the album is. I was imagining a spaghetti western soundtrack – Wild Bird is probably most obvious – but if you read that, you realise it’s about everything going wrong on the set while trying to make a film. Then you listen to, say, Oceans Apart, and the more surreal element to it – that’s where you see that it’s a sort of bastardised take on the genre. I would love to see that. Like [Fellini’s] 8½ in a way, but the set gets flooded.”

Jalen Ngonda

★★★★

Come Around And Love Me

DAPTONE. CD/DL/LP

Liverpool-based US soul brother impresses with accomplished debut.

Ngonda’s voice is a thing of wonder; a supple, sublimely soulful bel canto instrument that can rise to a soaring, hairs-on-the-neck-lifting falsetto cry. Though his arresting high tenor tone reverberates with echoes of Marvin Gaye’s liquid gospel and the pleading, forlorn wail of The Delfonics’ William Hart, Ngonda has developed a highly individualistic voice that he frames with evocative retro arrangements. Opening with the urgent title song, characterised by a jazzy *What’s Going On* vibe and David Van De Pitte-style string arrangement, the Maryland-born singer/songwriter takes the listener on a journey exploring the vicissitudes of love. Highlights include It Takes A Fool, juxtaposing psychedelic fuzz-toned guitar with dreamy, glistening vibraphone, and Lost, a desolate tale of heartbreak saluting producer Thom Bell’s work with The Delfonics. Simultaneously classic and contemporary, Ngonda has crafted an exquisitely soulful debut.

Charles Waring

Royal Blood

★★★★

Back To The Water Below

WARNER BROS. CD/DL/LP

Brighton’s millennial rock sourpusses untether their inner Smashing Pumpkins.

Royal Blood’s isolation as one of only a very few British rock chart-toppers to emerge in the last 15 years was all too manifest at BBC Radio One’s Big Weekend in May, as frontman Mike Kerr stropped out at the indifferent pop audience that greeted them. Ironically, he and drummer Ben Thatcher have been diversifying of late: after two LPs of piledriving riffage, 2021’s *Typhoons* was built on synth melodies, thereafter, beefed up. But this fourth album branches out to include considerable light and shade, with the expansive-but-to-the-point feel of Smashing Pumpkins’ *Gish*, or even *Led Zeppelin III*. Each side certainly begins heavy (Mountains At Midnight is ‘disco Sabbath’ in excelsis, Triggers even more so), but then Pull Me Through strips out Kerr’s trademark bass distortion for an acoustic, Beta Band vibe, while side two’s There Goes My Cool builds like a Slade ballad through bombastic chord changes to an arms-aloft singalong finale. With top-drawer tunes throughout.

Andrew Perry

Courtney Barnett

★★★

End Of The Day

MOM + POP. CD/DL/LP

Alt-rock anti-heroine releases 17 instrumentals.

“I turned 30, felt like I stepped over some sort of line, but I’m still lost,” Courtney Barnett says on Anonymous Club, Danny Cohen’s film about her life on tour. Originally conceived as a soundtrack to the movie, Barnett’s fourth solo album is purely instrumental sound-art collage, a way of redirecting the nervous energy that has driven her for so long. Usually a laconic lyricist, she has ditched the wordplay to focus on an interior ambient world created just through her guitar and the Oberheim synth effects of co-collaborator, Warpaint drummer Stella Mozgawa. Slow twanging notes hang in mid-air, looped and echoed in a way that is meditative and beguiling. In places it verges on doodling, as if Barnett is endlessly tuning her guitar, but tracks such as Intro or River sound darkly majestic, like deep, drifting hollowed-out Americana.

Lucy O’Brien

Kristin Hersh

★★★

Clear Pond Road

FIRE. CD/DL/LP

Throwing Muses mainstay in magic-realist minstrel mode.

Of all the US alt-ensembles signed by majors around the time of grunge, Boston’s Throwing Muses were perhaps the unhappiest misfits, too defiantly left-leaning for mainstream grooming. Hersh, their sole songwriter after Tanya Donelly left in 1991, initiated her solo offshoot in 1994, which has run parallel to Throwing Muses and more obtuse trio 50 Foot Wave ever since. In places, this twelfth solo LP has a markedly similar feel to her generation’s biggest-selling acoustic record, Nirvana’s *MTV Unplugged In New York*: on Ms Haha, tough strumming and foreboding cello underpin Hersh’s parched growl about the “crap shack we call home”. Her voice weathered to a softer huskiness, Hersh’s songs these days come across less stridently, with no intensity subtracted. Dandelion weaves arpeggiated alchemy, amid oblique images of “Cupid slinging dandelion hope”, while Palmetto’s medieval plucking resolves to the tingling pay-off, “no winter without spring”. Hard-won optimism, as ever, from this troubled heroine.

Andrew Perry

Matthew Halsall

★★★★

An Ever Changing View

GONDWANA. CD/DL/LP

Manchester jazz baron resets his lens to landscape.

Trumpeter, producer and record label founder, Matthew Halsall has built an industry around himself since dropping his debut LP – an assured collection of Miles-like ruminations – 15 years ago, when British jazz was much deeper underground. Since that time, his one-man label, Gondwana, has grown into an important, international outlet for jazz. His own work, 10 LPs in, is well defined now, along sharp, clean lines. This one expands on the rippling backdrops he used on 2020’s *Salute To The Sun*: looped percussion – log drums, kalimbas, steel shakers, chimes and bells – laying down a landscape which Halsall can walk through, playing in his clear tone. Water Street and Calder Shapes sparkle like rivers, with Chip Wickham’s lyrical flute and sax, while Alice Roberts’ evocative harp serves to remind you of Halsall’s deep admiration for Alice Coltrane.

Jim Irvin

Jalen Ngonda: exquisitely soulful.

Rosie Cohe

Neverending story: Pretenders' Chrissie Hynde is a rock'n'roll lifer.

The real thing

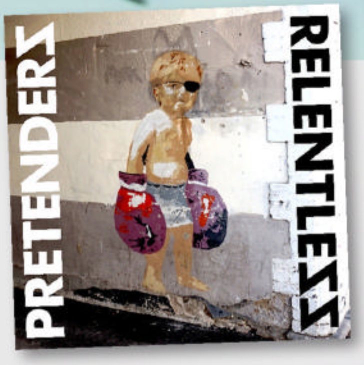
Persistently brilliant songwriting from Chrissie Hynde and James Walbourne. By **John Aizlewood**.

Pretenders

★★★★

Relentless

PARLOPHONE. CD/DL/LP



SEEMINGLY UNSURE as to where they fit in as they negotiate a fifth decade at the coalface, Chrissie Hynde has kept the Pretenders quietly chugging along of late, while exploring new directions – jazz-tinged covers; Bob Dylan covers – on a solo career that, more than anything, bought her time.

For what is only the twelfth Pretenders album, Hynde has dispensed with the production services of 2020's *Hate For Sale* helmsman Stephen Street in favour of David Wrench, the Grammy-nominated Welshman, who brings a broad but playful palette. On-off drummer Martin Chambers is off again but, as on *Hate For Sale*, her songwriting partner is James Walbourne, current lead guitarist and Richard Thompson's son-in-law.

For all its boundary pushing, *Relentless* accepts that since Hynde's voice is instantly recognisable whether she's hollering or crooning, it defines the Pretenders: she's a lifer, unable to escape, even if she wanted to. Endless personnel shuffles may bring renewal, but Hynde has always been a keen student of her own history. Intermittently self-referential, there's a Kid-like twang to A Love; while The Copa is a ballad in the I Go To Sleep tradition; there's both *Last Of The Independents*-style slickness on Look Away and *Break Up The Concrete*'s rootsiness on Just Let It Go.

Instinctively, Hynde has always been a rocker, even when her walk hasn't wholly vindicated her talk. When she rocks on this aptly titled, almighty whoosh of fresh air, she's heavier and denser than ever. The in-your-face opener Losing My Sense Of Taste thunders along like *No Code*-era Pearl Jam, but Hynde grinds her way through the mischief-drenched scuzzfest Merry Widow – "I'm a divorcee, but I feel like a widow, a merry, merry widow…" – and Vainglorious is as magnificently one-riff as peak ZZ Top. Meanwhile, Promise Of Love begins with a slow piano motif as Hynde muses upon past paramours, before she cranks up the tension and volume until it becomes the sort of ballad that demands cathedral organs and clattering cymbals.

Relentless is not, though, one-paced, and Hynde has always blossomed when she has something to prove; here it's finding a place for the Pretenders in 2023. Flexing her songwriting muscles, the percussive Your House Is On Fire has the gall to begin like a madrigal, but from its first moments Let The Sun Come In almost breaks into – of all things – Shiny Happy People. There's real new ground broken when Jonny Greenwood pops up to add a swirling string arrangement to the graceful closer I Think About You Daily, where Hynde ditches her swagger to sound more vulnerable than she has in years as she whispers, "I never could take good advice".

Surely *Relentless* is how Chrissie Hynde always wanted the Pretenders to sound.

Ki Price

Keeping it simple: Teenage Fanclub (clockwise from top left) Raymond McGinley, Norman Blake, Euros Childs, Dave McGowan and Francis McDonald continue to increase their potency.

Forever unchanging

Bruised yet wiser: the Fannies return to top form on their twelfth LP. By **Tom Doyle**.

Teenage Fanclub

★★★★

Nothing Lasts Forever

PEMA. CD/DL/LP

FREE FOR over three decades now from the typical creative trials and headaches of bands who try to reinvent their sound with each new album, Teenage Fanclub have shrewdly stuck with tweaking their winning formula: strummy guitar-led songs, high in melodic content, charting their emotional weather. From 2010's *Shadows* on, their records have increasingly documented the evolving feelings of forty-something men moving into their fifties and grappling with ageing and mortality to find some kind of inner peace.

This album's predecessor, 2021's *Endless Arcade*, found co-frontman Norman Blake in a period of personal turbulence (caused by his marriage break-up) and sounding uncharacteristically down, particularly in the quietly desolate The Sun Won't Shine On Me. Some of his songs on *Nothing Lasts Forever* directly address the lows he was suffering when we last heard from him, not least the timeworn but hopeful I Left A Light On, in which he confesses, "My life had lost its meaning/I was a lonely soul". It's one of three songs with the word "light" in the title, a signifier of the brighter mood throughout.

The Fanclub's twelfth album is also their second without the songs and voice of co-founder Gerard Love (who quit in 2018 having tired of touring) and with Euros Childs (formerly of Gorky's Zygotic Mynci) providing keyboards and simpatico vocal harmonies. The latter's contributions gently push the band forward sonically, whether it be via the entrancing Theremin-like analogue synth counter melody in Middle Of My Mind or the Harmonia-styled echoing organ layers that fade up at the beginning of Falling Into The Sun.

Both of the latter songs come from Raymond McGinley, who has pared his lyrics down to their most Zen-like qualities – see the repeated four-line mantra marking the passing of the seasons at the end of Tired Of Being Alone, or closer I Will Love You, which over seven minutes employs reverie-inducing aural textures and impossible dreams ("I will love you until the bigots are gone/After they apologise for all the harm that they've done") to emphasise his devotion.

NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

Overall, though, *Nothing Lasts Forever* is characterised by Blake's return to careful optimism. In the percussive, piano-led Self-Sedation, he turns McCartney-esque while quoting William Blake's Auguries Of Innocence ("'Some are born to endless night'/I'd say my namesake got that right"). In Back To The Light, the band brilliantly circle back to their primary Big Star influence as Blake joyously details the ending of a gig and the sheer wonder of jumping back on the tour bus before motoring off into the night.

It's a song that encapsulates Teenage Fanclub in 2023. The years have proven that the deceptive simplicity of their music only increases its potency, working hand-in-hand with their long commitment to the healing powers of brotherhood and melody.

Yowl

★★★★

Milksick

CLUE/EMI NORTH. DL/LP

South London noise quartet's wildly unpredictable debut.

yowl
milksick

First testing decibel limits around Peckham's Montague Arms scene as far back as 2016, this guitar-mangling all-male quintet have been patient in chiselling out their inaugural LP – a wise move, as they've matured beyond their declamatory baby steps (think: Idles) towards a prettier, more mercurial style echoing alt-rock's tune-rich giants. Virile Crocodile Sweat, about songwriterly frustration, casts off with Parquet Courts post-punk savvy, Gabriel Byrde's odd baritone almost out-meta-ing PC's Andrew Savage, while Donkey's Jawbone updates Pavement's Cut Your Hair with its follicular paranoia and itchy tempo shifts. At their nastiest, The Weatherman throws a Eighties Matchbox B-Line Disaster strop, but at the other extreme, Canis's tale of werewolves coupling by full moonlight brings exquisite falsetto-voiced languor, and A Birthday With David Berman, demo'd acoustically after the Silver Jews auteur's passing but never 'improved', wrong-foots with a touching finale. Yowl are blossoming before our very ears, and there's boundless potential to go forward from here.

Andrew Perry

Dot Allison

★★★★

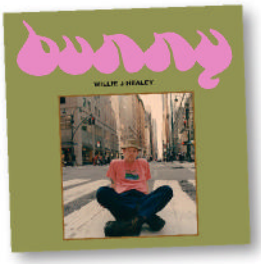
Consciousology

SONIC CATHEDRAL. CD/DL/LP

One Dove's former singer yields to the power of the ecosphere.

On Dot Allison's last album, 2021's *Heart-Shaped Scars*, Can You Hear Nature Sing? pondered the seasons' "myriad of melodies." Its follow-up, *Consciousology*, is suffused with analogous contemplations of nature, suggesting Scotland's Allison has consciously surrendered to channelling her perceptions of, and relation to, the natural world. Her past tie-ins with Massive Attack, Scott Walker, Paul Weller and more do not point here. Similarly, rather than One Dove's ambient-edged electro-pop with which she first gained attention, her sixth solo album places her within shape-shifting settings nodding to Spacemen 3's Big City, Mercury Rev at their most vaporous, Linda Perhacs, and other sonic voyagers bringing structure to what could be amorphous. The London Contemporary Orchestra's strings and contributions from Ride's Andy Bell and Hannah Peel help keep it grounded. Though not immediate, the intoxicating *Consciousology* envelops like a spring fog.

Kieron Tyler



Willie J. Healey

★★★★

Bunny

YALA!. CD/DL/LP/MC

Oxford singer-songwriter goes to New York, gets slinky. Good things happen.

It's been a long, frustrating haul for former boxer Willie J. Healey. Since being dumped by his major label after his first album and releasing his second at the height of the pandemic, he's supported Arctic Monkeys across Europe this year (they share management), and as the third looms he's hurtling towards Next Big Thing status. Recorded in New York with Loren Humphrey (Lana Del Rey/Florence + The Machine drummer and Arctic Monkeys engineer), *Bunny* is a push for the great hop forwards and it works. A slinky, soulful, witty, mid-paced affair, there's swearing aplenty on an album where Morning Teeth begins "What the fuck is going on?", while Thank You ("I wanna thank you for absolutely nothing at all") is related to Sly & The Family Stone's Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin) by more than just its title.

John Aizlewood

Gregory Alan Isakov

★★★★

Appaloosa Bones

DUALTONE/SUITCASE MUSIC. CD/DL/LP

Seventh album from the little-known Leonard Cohen of Americana.

A billion streams, a date at London's prestigious Roundhouse just one stop on a forthcoming European concert-hall jaunt, and a Grammy nod for 2018 album *Evening Machines*, Isakov is a consummate singer and writer of distilled Americana that's ripe with detail – and yet his UK media profile is almost zero. *Appaloosa Bones* (named after a spotted breed of horse) is prime Isakov: his velvet baritone glides over elegant and shimmering Wild West mirages, often just sketched by banjo and/or piano. Isakov combines minimalist backdrops with maximalist content, heavy on landscape, fauna and aching ruminations. He doesn't flinch from struggle and loss – Miles To Go documents a "broken heart, busted strings/Lamplight eyes, telephone wires" – but Isakov is more glass-half-full than most purveyors of Americana. Terlingua is particularly awestruck: "Let's try and not talk too much/Promise I won't say a thing/It's the owl who owns the evening."

Martin Aston

Róisín Murphy

★★★★

Hit Parade

NINJA TUNE. CD/DL/LP

Erstwhile Moloko singer's kaleidoscopic sixth solo album.

As she hurtles towards her 50th birthday, Róisín Murphy remains as restless as a teenager. Consequently, she's fiendishly difficult to pin down beyond her penchant for dance. Having collaborated with Stefan 'DJ Koze' Kozalla on his 2018 album *Knock Knock*, Murphy has recruited the German as a full production partner. The pair worked separately and remotely, but together they've fashioned their own vibrant, colourful world, where Can't Replicate begins in hypnotic electro fashion, deploys Murphy at her most breathy, adds stentorian piano, veers towards the throb of 808 State's Cubik and ends in a Madonna-esque wig-out. Meanwhile, You Knew, the other seven-minute-plus track, finds Murphy (sort of) rapping. Fade is a tease that she could do out-and-out pop if the mood were ever to take her, but there are too many strange and good ideas for anything quite so prosaic.

John Aizlewood

Hannah Georgas

★★★★

I'd Be Lying If I Said I Didn't Care

REAL KIND. CD/DL/LP

Articulate fifth LP from sparky Vancouver singer.

Juno-nominated Hannah Georgas cares too much, that's part of her problem. Brought up by strictly religious parents, music was her rebellious solace – and now the more honest she is, somehow the more playful her hooky, emotionally resonant indie-rock becomes. Scratch opens with plucked acoustic and Georgas's warm, vulnerable voice mulling over having to start again before gathering pace with upbeat synths. Better Somehow builds into anthemic beauty, with melodic trills against ringing guitar: "Maybe if I say it aloud/It will all be better somehow/And I can love you better…" Georgas's blend of vintage new wave with quirky ethereality includes touching haikus and lullabies, but it's the pissed-off frankness that wins out: "It's not my place to divulge, but I can't help it/After you leave I feel guilty, but I know I meant it." Gorgeously cathartic.

Glyn Brown

Corinne Bailey Rae

★★★★

Black Rainbows

THIRTY TIGERS. CD/DL/LP

Leeds-born double Grammy winner reinvents herself.

DURING HER 2016 US tour, Bailey Rae visited Chicago's Stony Island Arts Bank run by noted installation artist Theaster Gates. What she saw there – a vast archive of evocative artefacts, many reflecting African-American history – gave her an epiphany that made her reconsider her approach to the creative process. The effects of that visit can be felt in the 10 kaleidoscopic songs on her fourth album, all directly inspired by objects in the collection. The music, which is characterised by extraordinary switches in style, reflects the diversity of the archive, morphing from bleepy electronica (Earthlings) and futuristic R&B (Black Rainbows) to churning grunge rock with distorted megaphone vocals (Erasure). Different again is New York Transit Queen, a punky hybrid of X-Ray Spex and Elastica, but most impressive of all is Before The Throne Of The Invisible God, a stunning celestial soundscape enhanced by Aaron Burnett's Coltrane-esque saxophone.

Charles Waring

Corinne Bailey Rae: exploring evocative artefacts on her fourth LP.

CORINNE BAILEY RAE
BLACK RAINBOWS

Snake eyes: Alice Cooper documents life on the *Road*.

Highway to hell

The Coop supersizes his shock-rock mythos via an access-all-areas tour diary. By James McNair.

Alice Cooper

★★★★

Road

EARMUSIC. CD/DL/LP

FOR THOSE ambivalent about Hollywood Vampires, Alice Cooper’s still-undead supergroup with Joe Perry and Johnny Depp, his 2021 solo LP *Detroit Stories* seemed like a stake through the heart of stasis. A raucous and inspired love-letter to his Motor City stomping ground, *…Stories* proved Cooper could still deliver. On paper, *Road* looks a little less appetising, largely because documenting tour-life has often been the recourse of rockers strapped for inspiration. But Cooper – a man whose backstory groans with the weight of fabled encounters and incident – is of course better than that, and still has much to write about.

His twenty-second solo studio LP isn’t just a colourful, access-all-areas pass, it’s also a celebration of concert-going post-lockdown and a shrewd, playful magnification of the whole Alice Cooper mythos. “I’ve come to let you out of your cage!” he promises on Welcome To The Show, while opener I’m Alice sees the self-proclaimed “Father Of Fright” list his shock-rock credentials while decrying “the shameless pretenders who have come and gone.” The vibe is very much ‘let me entertain you’; Cooper one part P.T. Barnum, one part Shakespearean luvvie, and two parts raspy, grizzled gadabout.

Bob Ezrin – producer of such ’70s Cooper landmarks as *Killer* and *School’s Out* – was back for *Detroit Stories* and also oversees *Road*. This means we get his flair with horns and brass, and that the hooks beneath the bluster really pop on daft truck-stop waitress song Big Boots and Baby Please Don’t Go, the latter a poised ballad which sounds like it was penned for the Stones.

Cooper’s co-writers here include members of his touring band, the MC5’s Wayne Kramer, and Rage Against The Machine’s Tom Morello, who also solos on White Line Frankenstein, a lurid character-study of an over-stimulated tour bus driver. As Cooper illuminates all corners of touring life across such delightfully sleazy, under-thunk nuggets as Dead Don’t Dance and road crew homage Road Rats Forever, there is no mention of the golfing he might have snuck-in on rest days. But then the guy in the Pringle with the putter isn’t Alice Cooper – he’s Vincent Furnier.

Road is a hugely enjoyable hoot, and on 100 More Miles, a queasy, distinctly old-school ballad named for the distance home post-tour, there’s also a hint of poignancy as the song’s narrator ponders the ever-tricky transition back to civvy street. It’s a feeling both Alice Cooper and Vincent Furnier will know well.

ALICE COOPER
ROAD

GAUNT

★★★

Blind At The Age Of Four

3ON. DL/LP

Visual artist/producer’s debut deploys looping electronics to explore his rare eye condition.

Loosely themed around rare hereditary dystrophy of the eye which meant he spent much of his childhood in darkness, the debut LP from GAUNT, AKA visual artist Jack Warne, blends old and new technology to his will. If Favourite Memory and Sweet embrace darkwave disco with a loose pop sensibility, he seems unwilling to fully unleash elsewhere. The Colourbox-sampling Because I and bass-propelled Syncopate betray a gift for layering unexpected melodies below the surface, while *Blind…* has a similar spaciousness to *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, although its percussive bass lines and waves of synths have more in common with Throbbing Gristle, Mica Levi’s soundtracks or Nurse With Wound’s serener outings. A one-stop shop of synth mystery, it’s the sonic equivalent of a VHS horror flick.

Andy Cowan

Deeper

★★★★

Careful!

SUB POP. CD/DL/LP

Chicago quartet’s third LP crystallises their post-punk influences.

Contemporary takes on turn-of-the-’80s post-punk are often highly evolved from the lovably amateurish first steps of, say, Devo, Fire Engines or Flying Lizards, whose respective herky-jerky histrionics, fast-picking yelp and spooked electro-dub are routinely reconstituted into something more robust and professional – frequently on the same album. So it is on *Careful!*, a precision amalgam finessed for Chicago quartet Deeper’s Sub Pop debut. Since 2020’s jagged *Auto-Pain*, the band worked on smoothing their rough edges, and while there’s relentless existential angst in frontman Nic Gohl’s lyrics, controlled holler, and six-string scratching, most tracks feel ripe for alt-radio rotation: motorik-propelled Bite builds to a jubilant chorus worthy of Franz Ferdinand, while Everynight’s Strokes-like twitch evolves into another catchy chant. Pressure, meanwhile, finds Gohl thanking his wife to a dreamy groove reminiscent of Sonic Youth’s Schizophrenia, suggesting that Deeper are heading on an upwards trajectory.

Andrew Perry

Empire State Bastard

★★★

Rivers Of Heresy

ROADRUNNER. CD/DL/LP

Biffy Clyro members embrace the Olympian trials of metal’s sub-genres.

During downtime on the road, Biffy Clyro frontman Simon Neil and the band’s second guitarist Mike Vennart have long been partial to some Siege, Slayer and Pantera. Their thrash and grindcore dreams come true on *Rivers Of Heresy*, a miffed and misanthropic rage against right-wing extremism anchored by Slayer’s twinkle-toed double bass drum maestro, Dave Lombardo. With Vennart penning the nihilistic, sometimes de-tuned riffage and Neil shredding his larynx at both extremes of his range, highlights include punishing anti-war diatribe Sons And Daughters and epic prog-metal closer The Looming, which some might think a welcome reprieve from the melodic flatlining of the LP’s screamier bits. Already a formidable live force when joined by former Bitch Falcon bassist Naomi McLeod, Empire State Bastard make you feel like you’ve been in a cage fight with Mike Tyson.

James McNair

Devendra Banhart

★★★

Flying Wig

MEXICAN SUMMER. CD/DL/LP

In which the American/Venezuelan freak folker goes electronic.

Inspired by a hope-in-the-face-of-adversity poem by Buddhist priest Kobayashi Issa, *Flying Wig* sees Devendra Banhart make a ritualistic attempt to transmute personal loss and sadness into gratitude, forgiveness and praise. An acoustic music mission, you might wager, but with new label-mate Cate Le Bon producing and Banhart wearing one of her dresses and his grandmother’s pearls during recording for talismanic reasons, *Flying Wig* pulses with synths, heavily-treated electric guitars and beat-boxes instead. There’s a charming fragility to Fireflies, Banhart’s vocal close-miked and vulnerable, while Twin sounds sinister, evoking both *Scary Monsters*-era Bowie and Pink Floyd’s Another Brick In The Wall, Pt 2. Intimate, ambitious and just occasionally misfiring as on the humdrum Charger, *Flying Wig* was named for a hair-piece gifted to Banhart by artist Isabelle Albuquerque. Always unconventional, then – and thus refreshing.

James McNair

Jenny Risher

Various

★★★★

A Song For Leon (A Tribute To Leon Russell)

PRIMARY WAVE. CD/DL/LP

Leon Russell's carny army get their mad dog groove on.

Following Dr. John, and like his disciple across the water Elton John, Leon Russell was a spectacular late-'60s self-reinvention from hired-gun pianist (Claude Russell Bridges) into an eclectic singer-songwriter-showman drawing deep on Southern Americana. There's never a bad time to sing a Leon Russell song, and this album is as artistically varied as can be. Best of the faithful versions are Margo Price's rousing Stranger In A Strange Land and Monica Martin's intimate A Song For You; both have stronger voices than the distinctive but limited Russell. More radically, with shrewd critical insight Pixies glam-punk up the Mott The Hoople-adjacent Crystal Closet Queen, while U.S. Girls and Bootsy Collins take the cheekiest liberties with the Carpenters' hit Superstar, which just about survives a raunchy three-way of Lothario lubricity, mock-girlishness and synth-bass squelch.

Mat Snow

Becca Mancari

★★★★

Left Hand

CAPTURED TRACKS. CD/DL/LP

Third album from New Yorker transplanted to Nashville.

In thrall to Americana with 2017 debut *Good Woman*, Mancari evolved to indie rock with synthesizers on 2020's more adventurous *The Greatest Part*. Third time around, having weaned themselves off excessive alcohol consumption, aside from a fleeting twang on Mexican Queen and the drone guitar which propels You Don't Scare Me, *Left Hand* fully embraces sumptuous, languid electronica. Mancari's echo-drenched, dream-like vocals glide over the near-orchestral soundscapes of I Needed You and To Love The Earth, which concludes proceedings with a sweet, stark piano coda, but, alongside guests such as Alabama Shakes' Brittany Howard (on Bermuda Triangle) and Paramore's Zac Farro, Mancari never loses sight of a decent hook. Thus, Homesick Honeybee is more insistent; the earworm Over And Over tumbles like peak Regina Spektor, and the brass which heralds I Had A Dream briefly adds another soaring layer.

John Aizlewood

Tracy Nelson

★★★★

Life Don't Miss Nobody

BMG. CD/DL

An American music primer from a veteran.

Tracy Nelson's tremendous lung power hasn't waned since her beginnings as a solo artist and leader of the roots band Mother Earth in the 1960s. She was Americana before the genre as such existed, blending blues, soul, country, jazz and gospel. In this, her first album in a decade, she covers Sonny Boy Williamson, Ma Rainey, Allen Toussaint, Hank Williams, Willie Dixon and Chuck Berry, and recognises the commonality between the tributaries of American music. Longtime pals Willie Nelson, Marcia Ball, Charlie Musselwhite and Irma Thomas join Tracy for duets. Highlights include two versions of Stephen Foster's 19th century classic Hard Times, one with a band and the closer, starkly performed by Nelson on a 12-string guitar. It's a prayer for survival that speaks to our era by one hell of a survivor.

Michael Simmons

Here comes the strummer: Bobby Bazini gets into a sensual groove.

Michele Stodart

★★★

Invitation

KEEPSAKE. CD/DL/LP

Third solo album from the Magic Number.

Born in Trinidad, raised in New York and now a mother in London, Michele Stodart borrows little from Magic Numbers (apart from her brother Romeo, intermittently on piano) when she flies solo. Fan-funded, *Invitation* is a mellow, intricately arranged, emotionally damaged affair where Will Harvey's strings underscore the conversational Push & Pull, which owes as much to Suzanne Vega as *For The Roses*-era Joni Mitchell. These Bones nods to supper-club jazz, while Undone is how a quieter Sheryl Crow might sound. On an album replete with dark intimacy, Come Dance With Me is a despairing confession, while Drowning cites a "burning reminder of the mistakes I've made", and when she asks "where did our love go so wrong?" on Good Fight, it's genuinely moving. With The Magic Numbers still struggling to gain traction, Stodart could be onto something here, but there's a lot of pain to absorb.

John Aizlewood

Bobby Bazini

★★★★

Pearl

SPECTRA. CD/DL/LP

Those warm summer nights have a sultry new soundtrack.

Big at home but little known elsewhere, French-Canadian singer-songwriter Bobby Bazini has hitherto ploughed the field first mapped by such blue-eyed soul troubadours as Van, Rod and Joe Cocker. This, his fifth album, jumps out of a crowded rut long ruled by Ed Sheeran, thanks to a new partnership with Connor Seidel (1969 Collective, Charlotte Cardin, Les Sœurs Boulay) and a total creative rethink. Gone are the power-ballad plod and unmodulated whisper-to-bullroar dynamic in favour of a sensual groove and romantic arrangements inspired by João Gilberto, Jorge Ben and Terry Callier, which in turn demand more nuanced singing. *Pearl*'s filler-free 41-minute through-listen hints at a personal narrative (I Don't Talk To My Mother; Living Again), each of its 11 songs yielding fresh delights every spin. Michael Kiwanuka fans should harken pronto.

Mat Snow

AMERICANA

BY SYLVIE SIMMONS

The Handsome Family

★★★★

Hollow

LOOSE. CD/DL/LP

The king and queen of Americana Gothic follow up 2016's *Unseen*.

It's seven years since Brett and Rennie Sparks' last album – given all the dark, crazy weirdness in the real world maybe they figured they'd hang up their hats – but here's their twelfth album, with 11 new songs. This time, lyricist Rennie's strange obsessions range from the moth-eaten cloak of Aleister Crowley's impecunious Buddhist buddy Allan Bennett (slow, mournful, voice-and-piano Mothballs), to the probing questions no-one ever asked the Invisible Man (churchy, with its a cappella male choir). Nature still plays a big part: the moon can't be trusted, nor can the insects and mammals, though skunks get their own sweet waltz-time song with a whistled solo. Accompanied by electronic and acoustic instruments, Brett's baritone sounds less sombre on this album, more rich, relaxed, even crooning on Strawberry Moon – a perfect foil to Rennie's vision of a world full of blood and ghosts.

ALSO RELEASED

Steep Canyon Rangers

★★★★

Morning Shift

YEP ROC. CD/DL/LP

Steep Canyon Rangers' 2020 album *Arm In Arm* was one of their best, and the same applies here. The Grammy-winning band has it down to an art, from speedgrass (Deep End) to bluesy Band-esque Americana (Alabama Calling). The vocals particularly stand out this time: Birds Of Ohio's almost Californian harmonies; Second In Line's half-spoken words; and the long, choral a cappella outro on the instant classic Fare Thee Well, Carolina Gals.

Jobi Riccio

★★★★

Whiplash

YEP ROC. CD/DL/LP

Nashville-based Riccio's full-length album is a beauty. Not just her voice, which is lovely, but really good songs: the 24-year-old just won this year's John Prine Songwriter Fellowship award. These 11 originals are often reflective, with an understated accompaniment. You can hear her Rocky Mountain past in the music, but the lyrics are modern and personal. Among many highlights are the sun-gone-down Summer, tough-talking Sweet, and poignant Homesick – "for a home I don't have".

Sally Anne Morgan

★★★★

Carrying

THRILL JOCKEY. CD/DL/LP

Morgan's third album is a collection of pensive, beautiful songs with roots in old American and older Irish folk, in which the intricate, interesting musical backdrops accentuate the feeling of looking at things slightly askew (Dawn Circle). Opening with a lone banjo instrumental (Beekeeper), it ends with a drone-accompanied lullaby (Song For Arthur). In many ways, the album is a seamless continuum from 2020's debut *Thread* and the 2022 follow-up *Cups*.

Jesse DeNatale

★★★★

The Hands Of Time

BLUE ARROW. CD/DL/LP

Ramblin' Jack Elliott and Tom Waits are fans of this veteran San Francisco singer-songwriter, and you can hear why: the straight-up folk-blues structure of the songs and his very fine tale-spinning lyrics. Some songs on this fourth album were prompted by the mess the world is in (blues-Americana Stop The World; early-Dylan-esque Streets Of Sorrow), but in spite of it all, however dark it gets, there's warmth, even joy. As DeNatale sings in Late September, "The view is golden/Looking out with my weary eyes". *SS*

Hiss Golden Messenger, AKA M.C. Taylor: making a joyful noise.

Such, such were the joys

M.C. Taylor reorients to the bright side of the road. By **John Mulvey.**

Hiss Golden Messenger

★★★★

Jump For Joy

MERGE. CD/DL/LP

HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER
JUMP FOR JOY

SINGER-SONGWRITERS are not, as a breed, averse to mythologising their creative struggles. As careers stretch on, but effective ways of monetising a music-making life diminish, a lot of energy can be expended on grappling with the muse, and the business, and sometimes both at once.

The latest album by M.C. Taylor and Hiss Golden Messenger – roughly the North Carolina band's eleventh studio set in a productive 15 years – initially seems to conform to that stereotype. "I'm waiting/Trying to write my masterpiece," Taylor sings on the opener, 20 Years And A Nickel, "And it's coming out a riddle." *Jump For Joy*, though, is a not an album freighted with self-pity. Rather, it's shot through with a kind of hard-earned positivity, a radical acceptance.

The Hiss Golden Messenger catalogue is a remarkably consistent one, which tacitly rejects the whole concept of one-off masterpieces; a body of work which has evolved in subtle and consolatory ways ever since their debut, *Country Hai East Cotton*, in 2009. *Jump For Joy*, nevertheless, feels like a significant point in Taylor's creative journey. The rootsy musical blend – the country-soul and folk rock, the accents of funk, the faintest ghosts of dub, the blood ties to Bob Dylan and Van Morrison – is more seamless than ever. The current band, too, play fantastically, a more stable line-up than previous Hiss iterations whose intuitive skills can be tracked via a clutch of excellent live albums on Bandcamp.

What's new, though, is how Taylor has pushed his music's most rousing dimensions to the fore. If previous Hiss records generally maintained a fragile balance between his melodically uplifting and lyrically introspective compulsions, 2021's *Quietly Blowing It* perhaps drifted a little further to the latter end of the spectrum: very much a product of lockdown anxieties, of spiritual dislocation.

Jump For Joy, in contrast, makes its mission statement explicit from the title track down. "Jump for joy/Gimme apocalypse," Taylor sings, over a loose-but-tight New Orleans groove (Sam Fribush on piano in striking Allen Toussaint form). It's not deranged partying in the face of a world on fire, exactly, more a mature attempt to worry less, to be empowered by what a lifetime of making music has brought him.

To hear an artist, who's sometimes been hobbled by depression, find the mitigated defiance of Feeling Eternal – "For those down and out but still devoted, I'm one of them" – is inspiring enough. But after this rich, bracing record has ended, after Taylor has recruited Levon Helm's daughter Amy as a backing vocalist, and referenced Dickey Betts as well as the poet Mary Oliver, it's a line borrowed from Oliver that resonates strongest. "I'm just a nail in the house of the universe," Taylor sings on Nu-Grape, realistic enough to know his place in the greater scheme of things. Oliver's qualifier in her original poem, Blue Iris, is omitted, but the implication is crucial: "Tiny but useful."

Mitski

★★★★

The Land Is Inhospitable And So Are We

DEAD OCEANS. CD/DL/LP

Idiosyncratic pop visionary winningly slides into Cosmic Americana mode.

WHAT HAPPENS when one of modern music's most expansive and imaginative songwriters – accustomed to barbed confessions inside syncretic visions of sound – scales back into the cozy confines of so-called Americana, complete with pedal steel moans, country shuffles and full choral rapture? Something near magic, it turns out. Working with arranger Drew Erickson and a cast that borrows from Jack White's band and country rockers Pure Prairie League, Mitski explores a new space somewhere between Rufus Wainwright and Angel Olsen. She writes with the early aggression of the former, wielding scenes of seemingly content domesticity as prompts for questioning her beliefs, mortality, and ambition. And sliding from torchy countrypolitan laments to Carnegie-sized grandeur, she invokes the versatility of the latter, folding a world of doubt, affirmation, and equivocation into 32 minutes. Mitski has long stared at happiness and wondered what comes next; here, she spies it, smiles, and then shrugs, the smart band beneath glowing like some warmth hearth on a cold Los Angeles night.

Grayson Haver Currin

Hanging around: Mitski explores new spaces.

Ebru Yildiz

Raw Poetic

★★★★

AWAY
BACK IN

Away Back In

DEF PRESSE. CD/DL/LP

Philly rapper completes album triad with guitarist P-Fritz and beatmaker Damu The Fudgemunk.

Conceived as a "garage rock LP enveloped in hip-hop jazz", Raw Poetic's eighth LP swerves left from 2022's *Laminated Skies* and this year's *Space Beyond The Solar System*. Whether tackling end-of-times chaos over the distorted lead of Bird's Eye or vulnerability on introspective indie rap head-nodder Rehab, Poetic smoothly transitions between rapping and singing over Damu The Fudgemunk's naturalistic drum programming and P-Fritz's largely acoustic jazz/rock bridging guitar shapes. Both are rare moments of darkness, Poetic's preternaturally sunny personality and innate pop sense shining through Ease Side's infectious refrain ("We don't have to worry at all") and the title track's moving celebration of friendship. A conversational, spiritually attuned set that oozes festival campfire vibes.

Andy Cowan

Slowdive

★★★

Everything Is Alive

DEAD OCEANS. CD/DL/LP

Reanimated shoegazing heroes spring back into action.

With 2017's self-titled fourth album, Slowdive finally took the lap of vindication owing since 1995's *Pygmalion* (the last record of their first incarnation) was released into Britpop's unforgiving climate. *Everything Is Alive* proves the band remain committed to making their own musical weather, Shanty opening proceedings with grand drama (and not just because it lightly echoes the Line Of Duty theme tune). Chained To A Cloud, where singers and guitarists Rachel Goswell and Neil Halstead just miss each other in the gloom, or the willow-weave guitar patterns of Alife signal change and unpredictability while sticking close to their dreamy operations manual. The sense of quest propels Skin In The Game and The Slab, effectively onomatopoeic thanks to Simon Scott's drumming. Evocative rather than vivid in a way that evokes *Faith*-era Cure's greyscale atmospheres, *Everything Is Alive* is the sound of Slowdive still holding their impressive earthly form.

Victoria Segal

Kendra Morris

★★★★

I Am What I'm Waiting For

KARMA CHIEF. CD/DL/LP

New York soul singer's latest collection of adept genre-hopping.

Post-pandemic has been a hectic period for New York-based vocalist Kendra Morris: not content with releasing *Nine Lives*, her first album in half a decade, last year she revised and added material to her 2016 EP, Babble. This creative renaissance continues with *I Am What I'm Waiting For*, co-written and produced by Brooklyn multi-instrumentalist Torbitt Schwartz. Although soul, R&B and hip-hop provide the album's backbone, it offers bubblegum pop (One Last Joyride), jazz-tinged no wave (What Are You Waiting For), floating ethereality (All Your Jokes) and Amy Winehouse-style funk (Dominoes), all united by Morris's singular, bittersweet vocals. Still Spinning is one of the best songs Morris has written: with its nod to David Axelrod's *The Edge*, it demonstrates the potential she has to scale up to larger stages. *I Am What I'm Waiting For* is little short of joyous.

Daryl Easlea

Charif Megarbane

★★★★

Marzipan

HABIBI FUNK. CD/DL/LP

Prolific Beirut-based multi-instrumentalist breaks cover for library music-inspired collection.

With more than 100 albums to his name, under a bewildering array of aliases, Charif Megarbane has been a prolific cottage industry for years. Finally, the mask comes off for his first contemporary Habibi Funk album. The Beirut-based multi-instrumentalist here reveals himself to be a devotee of library music, and, over 17 tracks, transports the KPM wrecking crew to a sunny, romantic Middle East with aplomb. Opener Souk El Ahad captures the exotica of the market with electric sitar lines and chaotic rhythms; Pas De Dialogue – very Francis Lai – is a joyous drive down a coastal road in an open-top sports car, possibly heading to the resort conjured up in Portemilio; while Tarator has Khruangbin's fingerprints all over it. If you like cars, winding highways and beaches, this has got your name on it.

David Hutcheon

شريف مكربنه
مرصبان

Carlos Niño & Friends

★★★★

(I'm Just) Chillin', On Fire

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM. CD/DL/LP/MC

LA percussionist/producer's oceanic celebration.

As with Coleridge's The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner, water is everywhere on Carlos Niño's latest. The sound of the sea sluices through a sprawling, subtly-mutating 80-minute suite reconfigured from long improvisational sessions as the well-connected conceptualist draws from far and wide (free jazz, New Age, hip-hop, psychedelia, classical) while allowing his collaborators the spotlight. Be it otherworldly malombo purveyor Sibusile Xaba sliding into the outer zone (Taaaud), Black Nile saxophonist Aaron Shaw riding free-flowing funk (One For Derf), a wonderfully wistful Kamasi Washington (Eightspace 082222) or Laraaji and Photay shape-shifting above a vast repertoire of gongs, chimes and bells (Maha Rose North 102021, Breathwork), Niño's narrative arcs lead the listener down one celestial rabbit hole after another, swathed in comforting washes of sound.

Andy Cowan

Alabaster DePlume

★★★★

Come With Fierce Grace

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM. CD/DL/LP

Brit jazzer/blue-sky orator's wonderfully searching offcuts from 2022's *Gold*.

Alabaster DePlume, AKA Gus Fairbairn, recorded 2022's *Gold* live and impromptu at Hackney's Total Refreshment Centre, weaving both his beautifully understated sax and gobbets of motivational spoken-word through improvisations with a shifting cast over two weeks. Here, not at all underwhelmingly, are another 42 minutes of magic hewn from those sessions' 17 hours of tape. Though second track What Can It Take reprises *Gold*'s 'courage of my love' poem, and there are vocal contributions from Falle Nioke and Momoko Gill (the latter's Did You Know is exquisite), *Come With Fierce Grace* feels less verbally encumbered, closer to 2020's *To Cy & Lee: Instrumentals Vol. 1*. The preponderance of hand percussion and unspecified rustling variously evokes African tribal music and Dr. John's sulphurous Louisiana voodoo – deep vibes, either way. Fairbairn's side-of-mouth playing is extraordinary, bucking the universal post-millennial effort to out-blast Coltrane, in favour of beautifully gentle explorations which are both intrepid and sublimely calming.

Andrew Perry

Jonathan Wilson: on a curious trip.

Jonathan Wilson

★★★★

Eat The Worm

BMG. CD/DL/LP

The criteria for Wilson's latest? "It's got to be kind of strange." And so it is.

JONATHAN WILSON
EAT THE WORM

RIGHT NOW, the thrilling re-invention of production aesthetics vis-à-vis trad music feels like a two-hander between California-based artist/producers Blake Mills (see interview page 46) and Jonathan Wilson. Both moonlight with the great and the good, and both make solo LPs which delight in taking risks denied them while producing others. *Eat The Worm*, possibly alluding to the psychotropic properties of tequila-dwelling invertebrates, is a whole other trip, however. Stylistic Easter eggs confound and delight, hence the Zappa-esque glock flurry which violates bar-room ballad Marzipan, the trippy Leslie-cabinet vocal of Hollywood Vape, and the cantering, light-orchestral thrills of The Village Is Dead. Lyrically, too, we're down the rabbit hole, hence bossa-reverie Wim Hof mentions the said Dutchman and a "drug-addled" Daniel Lanois. *ETW*'s wonderland gets curiouser and curiouser.

James McNair

Margo Cilker

★★★★

Valley Of Heart's Delight

LOOSE. CD/DL/LP

Washington state-based country singer-songwriter maps the highs and lows.

"I'm going, I'm going, I'm gone," sings Margo Cilker on Sound & Fury, one of the moments on *Valley Of Heart's Delight* that describes a life in constant motion, state lines and city limits flashing past in the mirror. Cilker's follow-up to 2021 debut *Pohorylle* never just slips by, however, whether she's on the moss-free roll of I Remember Carolina (complete with Bob Dylan reference and an adorable rhyme scheme that matches "Texas" with "where my ex lives"), or Lowland Trail's quest for a simple life. Horns, accordion and fiddle kick up dust around her, yet on the gently unspooling All Tied Together, or Crazy Or Died's cracked and creased storytelling, Cilker finds space to meditate on inheritance, legacy, all kinds of roots. "I don't know where my home is," she sings: with these songs, though, Cilker is building a beautiful place of her own.

Victoria Segal

Mari Boine & Bugge Wesseltoft

★★★★

Amame

BY NORSE. CD/DL/LP

Ethereal duets from the very north of Europe

Hailing from Tromsø, in the Arctic north of Norway, Mari Boine has often sung about being a member of the Sámi minority, a people whose language and way of life have been traditionally treated as inferior and often discriminated against. Here, however, she takes the role of community elder responsible – like a West African griot – for handing down wisdom: song titles translate as So We Don't Fade (Amame Jávkat) and I Stand Tall (Mihá). Her partner is the jazz pianist Bugge Wesseltoft (from the, relatively speaking, far south of Norway), who provides an elegantly sparse platform of raw, spectacular beauty in which every moment of silence resonates. If you fell for Choir Of Young Believers' Hollow Talk (the theme music for The Bridge), then this is a drop of a heavier brew, but one that will welcome repeat listenings as the nights draw in.

David Hutcheon

Pale Blue Eyes

★★★★

This House

FULL TIME HOBBY. CD/DL/LP

Electro-pop, motorik and shoegazing combine to make an absorbing whole on Devon outfit's second.

Since Pale Blue Eyes' 2022 debut, *Souvenirs*, the core duo of married couple Lucy and Matt Board have left Devon for Sheffield after the death of Matt's mother (his childhood home is seen on the sleeve of *This House*). While the lyrics of their second album reflect on loss and memory, this set of glistening, motorik-saturated electro-pop is hard-edged and joyously kinetic – more energised and robust than before. There is also a newly assumed shoegazing haze. At the album's end, feet come off the gas for the stately Underwater, a *Technique* New Order and *Head Over Heels*-era Cocteau Twins-infused aural maelstom standing apart from what's informed it. Dealing with change and loss has given Pale Blue Eyes the strength coursing through this compelling confirmation of their standing as pop auteurs.

Kieron Tyler

Loraine James

★★★★

Gentle Confrontation

HYPERDUB. CD/DL/LP

Experimental electronica bursting with emotion.

Loraine James has swiftly established herself as one of the most courageously innovative artists in contemporary electronic music. Through experimental R&B, glitchy mini-symphonies and esoteric ambient, ideas tumble relentlessly from her. She's prolific, too – *Gentle Confrontation* is the north Londoner's sixth album in five years. Hugely personal, it's highlighted by the mournful, beatless loop of 2003, with its opening line of, "When I was seven my dad went to heaven." Resentment, confusion and, ultimately, comfort, wrapped up inside three minutes. It also finds James increasingly finding her own voice as accompaniment. The title track offsets cinematic strings with explosive percussion of machine gun intensity, her vocals speeding up and slowing as if in conversation with her younger self. Several guests pop by – including Black Midi drummer Morgan Simpson on I DM U, whose inventive approach finds a kindred spirit in James – but it's the emotional, cathartic journey of the chief protagonist that captivates the most.

Stephen Worthy

Wreckless Eric

★★★★

Leisureland

TAPETE. CD/DL/LP

Whole Wide World-builder creates his unhappy place.

Almost killed by Covid in 2020, inveterate road-warrior and former Stiff records firecracker Eric Goulden retreated into inner space as he recorded at home in upstate New York. An oddball concoction of Dr. Feelgood and La Düsseldorf, his first post-pandemic record depicts an imaginary New Beatles struggling to escape from a run-down British seaside town, modelled on the brownfield fringes of Cromer. Sweet Home Alabama fantasies are undercut by basic ignorance of geography on Southern Rock ("I didn't know where anything was," growls Sussex-born Goulden), "John, Paul, George and Alan" thrive in obscurity on Standing Water, while Bo Diddley strides the back streets of Norfolk on The Old Versailles. It doesn't end entirely happily, but Drag Time finds heroic redemption in the shadow of the rusty waltzers. A sobering adventure close to something like home.

Jim Wirth

Peter Brewis

★★★★

Blowdry Colossus

DAYLIGHT SAVING. CD/DL/LP

Field Music man's beguiling instrumental detour.

Under the name The Week That Was, Brewis's solo debut from 2008 was inspired by a murder mystery whilst sharing fractured pop contours with his 'day job' in Field Music alongside brother David. *Blowdry Colossus* is also dizzily inventive art-pop, yet eight of nine tracks are instrumental, built on a bedrock of bouncy analogue synths and drum machines, in what sounds like the most playful of lockdown projects. Cause and effect are wildly at odds; new jack swing, for example, was Brewis's inspiration for Generation Dial Up but it sounds more like the soundtrack to an '80s video game. Brewis namedrops both Yellow Magic and Penguin Café Orchestras as starting points, but Second Hand Slow is pure synth-stabbing Art Of Noise, Panda Tonic is starlit Eno ambience and the sole song/lyric, Dog Bark Dark, buzzes like Field Music.

Martin Aston

The Lilac Time

★★★★

Dance Till All The Stars Fall Down

POETICA. CD/DL/LP

Tintin in Americana: Brum great's big (West) country revelation.

Duran Duran founder, Kiss Me hitmaker, and Robbie Williams co-writer, Stephen Duffy has maintained a certain left-field cachet, with The Lilac Time (the band he formed with brother Nick in the 1980s) held in stellar regard by Michael Head/Lloyd Cole ultras worldwide. Now based in Cornwall, the Duffys' love of big-sky Americana, ABBA-adjacent melodies and Fred Neil-ish worldly wisdom courses through their first album since 2019. "It's not what happens to you, it's how you react," Duffy announces on Your Vermillion Cliffs, turning the elegiac dials up to 11 and they never quite come down. The Long Way makes a heroic argument for friendship and compassion, while The Lilac Time's third-on-the-bill years become glory days on The Band That Nobody Knew. "Why do you think it went wrong?" Duffy wonders, but here is proof that it never really did.

Jim Wirth

Shakti

★★★★

This Moment

ABSTRACT LOGIX. CD/DL/LP

John McLaughlin's Indo-fusion group's first studio outing since 1977.

After the jazz-rock supergroup Mahavishnu Orchestra crashed and burned in early 1974, its co-founder John McLaughlin found solace in playing acoustic music with Shakti, a band he co-founded with tabla master Zakir Hussain. Their unique marriage of jazz and Indian music yielded three commercially successful albums in the 1970s before they were mothballed, only to be briefly revived in the late-'90s and early 2000s. Twenty-two years after their last album, 81-year-old McLaughlin and 72-year-old Hussain have re-formed the band and added the impressive vocalist Shankar Mahadevan together with the violin virtuoso Ganesh Rajagopalan and percussion maestro Selvaganesh Vinayakaram. The resulting music, staying true to Shakti's roots, is a gorgeous cross-cultural melange. Highlights range from the skittishly playful Bending The Rules to the jazz-inflected Sono Mama and an epic ballad called Karuna, where McLaughlin's warbling guitar-synth melodies beautifully entwine with Rajagopalan's plangent violin.

Charles Waring

Blind Boys Of Alabama

★★★★

Echoes Of The South

SINGLE LOCK. CD/DL

Spellbinding follow-up to 2017's *Almost Home*.

On this first album in six years, the gospel institution who made their first public performance in 1944 pay tribute to the songs that inspired them: from traditional spirituals such as You Can't Hurry God to civil rights soul by Pops Staples, The Impressions and Stevie Wonder. Recorded live to tape with a small, stripped-back band in Sheffield, Alabama, the end result is quite overwhelming, the five-piece's frantic call-and-response and excitable vamping tapping into the rudiments of life – the love, joy, hurt, struggle, loss that defines us. Straight after recording, their nonagenarian leader Jimmy Carter retired from performing and erstwhile members Paul Beasley and Benjamin Moore Jr have since died. If this is to be their last album, then it's one hell of a finale.

Lois Wilson

Blind Boys Of Alabama: tapping into the rudiments of life.

Michael Weintraub, Courtesy of Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts

P.G. Six

★★★★

Murmurs & Whispers

DRAG CITY. DL/LP

US psych-jam polymath returns to his folk likeness.

In recent years Pat Gubler has been an essential ingredient of the contemporary post-Dead psych jam scene with pivotal roles in Garcia Peoples, Wet Tuna and Weeping Bong Band. However, back in the early noughties this Bronx-born multi-instrumentalist was part of the equally enthralling US 'free folk' collective, repurposing spooked strains of US and UK acoustic music to create mesmerising lo-fi hauntings, like a dream-state re-imagining of The Incredible String Band. Twelve years on from electric full-band Tull groover *Starry Mind*, with a voice now reminiscent of Pearls Before Swine's Tom Rapp, Gubler has returned to the original P.G. Six template of mysterious ballads and uncanny instrumentals. Recorded in upstate New York with Clark Griffin and Wednesday Knudsen of Weeping Bong Band, this is transcendent stuff; frail tales of love, death, exhaustion and the passing seasons set to harp, guitar and sax, all moored to the landscape by weathered waves of electric drone.

Andrew Male

Benjamin Gustafsson

★★★★

The Nature Within

DECCA. CD/DL/LP

Swedish woodsman's fifth album.

Living in the forests near Malmö, apparently with only a stack of Coldplay LPs for company, piano wizard Benjamin Gustafsson emerged in 2017 as a mostly instrumental artist, who spun all sorts of delicate, comforting webs. These days, influenced by two years of global travel, he's expanding his horizons musically as well as geographically. Five out of these 11 tracks confirm he's still no stranger to the wordless (hence the lovely Nature which features both birdsong and babbling brook), but Gustafsson's plaintive vocals add a new dimension to the despairing Alone Again, which includes more birdsong, plus children playing in the distance. He covers Avicii (a slow, hushed Wake Me Up) and also Nick Drake (again, slower paced, as keyboards and strings replace Drake's guitar on Which Will), artists who, unsettlingly, are linked only by their tragic suicides.

John Aizlewood

JAZZ

BY ANDY COWAN

Jaimie Branch

★★★★★

Fly Or Die Fly Or Die Fly Or Die ((World War))

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM. CD/DL/LP

Late trumpeter's final Fly Or Die album completes trilogy with pizzazz.

Recorded in Nebraska four months before her death last summer, Jaimie Branch's final foray with bassist Jason Ajemian, cellist Lester St Louis and drummer Chad Taylor finds her super-bassy, minimally-tooled groove machine in peak form. While the positively spooked Burning Grey witnesses her vivid trumpet burrowing into the nooks and crannies of its progressive groove, her Colombian roots poke through the party-hearty propulsion of Baba Louie. More vocally forthright than ever (heartbreakingly so on closer World War), free song titan Fay Victor's singing lessons pay repeated dividends, as telling melodies cut through the naturalistic style-hopping. In a 2015 interview Branch stressed "I mean every note that I play". It's an inescapable truth on this larger than life finale.

ALSO RELEASED

Siema Ziema

★★★★

Second

BYRD OUT. DL/LP

On first listen, you might conclude Siema Ziema are an electronic band creating querulous jazz fusions. Closer investigation finds the off-radar, all-acoustic Polish outfit mastering their discreet craft above a buzzing hive of sax bees on Atlant, while making playful connections to nature on Get Exhausted With Me. Elsewhere, 12-minute slow-release standout All Those Moments marries searching spirituality with distorted drones and dark ambience. A stunning return.

Sam Eastmond

★★★★

The Bagatelles Vol. 16

TZADIK. CD/DL

Issued in John Zorn's 70th birthday month, Eastmond's latest offers big-band interpretations of eight of the prolific composer's 300-track *Book Of Bagatelles*. The London trumpeter is in his element, conjuring dramatic orchestral manoeuvres from its foundational three-line melodies, full of obtuse undercurrents, atypical solo bursts and criss-crossing counter-melodies. At 72 minutes it's no easy listen, but its idiom-shifting blur of improv and notation is deliriously astute.

Kurt Elling & Charlie Hunter

★★★★

SuperBlue: The Iridescent Spree

EDITION. CD/DL/LP

This second pair-up between vocal stylist and guitar improviser supplies a liberating blend of funky originals and inventive covers. Pick of the former is Little Fairy Carpenter, Elling gliding up the scales with bluesy, balladic force. He supplies new words for Ornette Coleman's Lonely Woman, a study in contrasts, his sonorous critique of coercive behaviour offset by Corey Fonville's high-tempo percussion.

Khalab

★★★★

Layers

HYPERJAZZ. DL/LP

A giant step up from *Black Noise 2084*'s Afro-futurist soundscapes, *Layers* captures Italian DJ/radio host Khalab in fully collaborative mode. Whether exploring sax and drum atmospherics alongside Emanative and Tamar Osborn (Conscious Friendship), soundtracking Joshua Idehen's shivery spoken-word paean to self (Layers) or embarking on a twinkling spiritual quest alongside Tenderlonious (Romantic Loco), jazz is the beating heart behind his wild roaming excursions. *AC*

Woods

★★★★

Perennial

WOODSIST. CD/DL/LP

Brooklyn label boss loops up a dreamy twelfth outing with its flagship combo.

Jeremy Earls's imprint – launchpad for artists including Kurt Vile, Shannon Lay and former Woods bassist, Kevin Morby – have cohered around his own band's releases for almost 20 years. Initially chasing ethereal psych-folk, the group's frontiers widened considerably on 2016's *City Sun Eater In The River Of Light* to include tougher psychedelia and soul-tinged speculations, while 2019's stint backing Silver Jews' David Berman on *Purple Mountains*, was another brightly sparkling performance. This time out, Earl tore up Woods' compositional rule book, concocting loops which he, enduring henchman Jarvis Taveniere and drummer John Andrews jammed over, then edited the yield into *Perennial*'s 11 tracks. With his voicing now settled into a soft falsetto, Between The Past and particularly Sip Of Happiness have a singer-songwriterly grace evoking mid-'70s Fleetwood Mac. Four instrumentals are more exploratory, White Winter Melody's deliciously spacey, pedal steel-topped textures warming the cockles à la Boards Of Canada. Organic, evergreen loveliness.

Andrew Perry

Stephen Steinbrink

★★★

Disappearing Coin

WESTERN VINYL. DL/LP

The Oakland-based songwriter examines the limits of wonder.

The title and concept of *Disappearing Coin* are inspired by a YouTube video in which a street magician performs this trick for a teenage passer-by. Within the course of 20 tracks, Stephen Steinbrink ponders such wonders and our reactions to them. Musically, his observations translate into playful conclusions, such as the Dr Who-esque keys on Pony, and xylophone ascent on instrumental Step's Disappearing Coin, hinting at soundtracks by Mark Mothersbaugh. Elsewhere, the album sums up the healing techniques the songwriter has embraced since 2018's *Utopia Teased*, written in the wake of the Ghost Ship warehouse fire that killed 36 people. Lead-off track Opalescent Ribbon undulates at a steady pace with blooming polyphony, while subsequent songs maintain a meditative vibe, reflecting Steinbrink's Buddhist practice. Still, there is a fine line between hygge and ennui, as the protagonist tries on Cat Stevens's shoes for an uneven spiritual quest.

Irina Shtreis

Romy

★★★★

Mid Air

YOUNG TURKS. CD/DL/LP

The last xx member to release a solo album.

"She's on my mind every hour of every day/The things we could do, oh it takes my breath away." After years of oblique signals and inky guitars across three xx LPs, Romy Madley-Croft emerges boldly and brightly, female pronouns everywhere, full tilt into piano-driven house music in all its euphoric, bittersweet glory. *Mid Air*'s focus on the power and glory of love begins with Love Her ("Never in the world have two others been closer than us") before exploring how relationships begin (giddy on Weightless, nervy on The Sea), how they hurt (Did I), confound (Mid Air) and endure (Strong), ending on the uncertain future of She's On My Mind. Ultimately, *Mid Air* is an ecstatic love letter to love, but also the queer clubs where Romy found validation and her soundtrack to liberation.

Martin Aston

Colleen

★★★★

Le Jour Et La Nuit Du Réel

THRILL JOCKEY. CD/DL/LP

Intricate, minimal, modular synth movements from French auteur.

As minimal as Cécile Schott's musical tools are on her eighth album as Colleen – a monophonic, semi-modular Moog Grandmother synth and two delay units – *Le Jour Et La Nuit Du Réel* is delicately, intensely intricate. The Barcelona-based French artist's music has flowed over two decades from loops and samples, through to acoustic ambient, avant-garde dub and even contemporary baroque. Colleen's first album since 2007's *Les Ondes Silencieuses* to eschew vocals, it began life as a set of more traditionally structured songs with lyrics. Gradually, the restrictive nature of Colleen's musical set-up forced them to be stripped back and reshaped, in an effort to explore the possibilities of synthesis. The seven studies here are made up of multiple movements, each a subtle variation on that study's theme. A mix of frantic, modular arpeggios (Subterranean), spaced out, fluttering drone (The Long Wait) and sumptuous filigree melodies (Les Parenthèses Enchantées), it possesses a charm and innocence that's genuinely disarming.

Stephen Worthy

Explosions In The Sky

★★★

End

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

Texan post-rock gift that keeps on giving.

After 23 years and 10 LPs (including five soundtracks) of instrumental ebb-and-flow from minimalist calm to maximalist storm, the title of Explosions In The Sky's eleventh could justifiably refer to a farewell. But no, the Texan quartet explain, it's the latest in a story arc of LP titles; in this case a "rumination on life and death," which suitably chimed with Earth's current 'end times' vibe, from sorrow to rage, elevated by post-rock's most luminescent guitars. Six-minute intro Ten Billion People builds to a vast crush to match its title; a spectral Loved Ones, which feels like a warning, leads to the more solemn Peace Or Quiet, which sounds like acceptance – perhaps of grief as the price of love. Peace is shattered by the closing It's Never Going To Stop, which suggests their survivalist instincts, and the band's longevity, is ever-strong.

Martin Aston

Teddy Thompson

★★★★

My Love Of Country

CHALKY SOUNDS. CD/DL/LP

A second LP of classic country covers.

A COMPANION piece to his 2007 LP *Upfront & Down Low*, *My Love Of Country* wears Teddy Thompson's, well, love of country on its sleeve. It's a surprise that Thompson's honeyed croon doesn't get more praise, and it fits these 'golden era' tunes like a well-worn saddle. Being able to call on backing vocalists of Rodney Crowell and Aoife O'Donovan's calibre doesn't hurt his chances of hitting every nail on the head, but alongside such classics as A Picture Of Me (Without You) (George Jones) I Fall To Pieces (Patsy Cline), Love And Learn (Dolly Parton) and Cryin' Time (Buck Owens/Ray Charles), he also mines the inner country song at the heart of I'll Regret It All In The Morning by his parents, Richard and Linda Thompson. Love, truth, honesty and sincerity pour out of every note, almost like these songs were being recorded for the very first time.

Andy Fyfe

Saddling up: Teddy Thompson mines the country classics.

TEDDY THOMPSON
MY LOVE OF COUNTRY

Dengue Fever

★★★

Ting Mong

TUK TUK. CD/DL/LP

The Cambodian surf-pop band's belated return.

DENGUE FEVER
TING MONG

Twenty years since Dengue Fever's debut album and eight since their last long-player, *Ting Mong* finds the Los Angeles-based fusion project further broadening their horizons, evidencing the pensiveness brought on by lockdown, as well as a willingness to break with old strictures. The tasteful, reverb-tinged arrangements of Touch Me Not, Silverfish and Room 720 are perfect framings for Chhom Nimol's dreamy vocals, there's a touch of dub on Macho Purple Sunset, and Late Checkout At The Sunset is a melancholic jazz instrumental. Although the English male vocals of Over The Handlebars and romance mismatch Great On Paper are momentary distractions, the band provides an engagingly varied atmosphere, enabling Nimol to make the most of her wide vocal range, conjuring diverse emotions and moods.

David Katz

Emil Amos

★★★★

Zone Black

DRAG CITY. DL/LP

Formerly of OM/Holy Sons/Grails, Amos's latest pits his yen for psychedelia and lingering melancholy against spooked '80s synth soundtracks. Nimble percussive ticks and depth-charged arrangements that nod to Floyd, Carpenter and Goblin help summon a heady world. *AC*

Fust

★★★★

Genevieve

DEAR LIFE. CD/DL/MC

Fust's Aaron Dowdy writes intense, range-worn, blue-collar country music, with an elegiac warmth and everyday beauty. Comparisons might be made with Doug Paisley, Califone, early Wilco or Joan Shelley, but Dowdy has a melancholy small-town poetry all his own. *AM*

Goat

★★★★

The Gallows Pole

ROCKET RECORDINGS. DL

Midsommar murder in West Riding as Swedish psych troupe score Shane Meadows' TV version of Ben Myers' visceral tale of 18th century coiners. Two 10-minute epics heave with mist-swirling portent, flute and percussive dread; Jazzman brings pastoral relief. *JB*

Cory Hanson

★★★★

Western Cum

DRAG CITY. CD/DL/LP

Who buys an LP called *Western Cum*, its sleeve airbrushed with globs of glowing sperm in the Arizona desert? Anyone hoping to hear the Wand frontman deliver more surreal, neon-psych country rock, in sweet vocal harmonies and super-crunchy six-string riffs. That's who. *AM*

dadá Joãozinho

★★★

tds bem Global

INNOVATIVE LEISURE. CD/DL/LP

While Brazil's toxic politics weigh heavily in the words of this 23-year-old's debut, its porous, stylistic fusion (baile funk, bossanova, dub) is effortlessly light. Gritty raps (Cuidado!), dramatic pop throwdowns (Habitual) or trad samba (Pai e Mãe) jumpstart the serotonin. *AC*

Don Kapot

★★★★

I Love Tempo

W.E.R.F. CD/DL/LP

Erstwhile rhythm section for Africa 70's Oghene Kologbo, Jakob Warmenbol and Giotis Damianidis supply rampant ammo for Viktor Perdieus' rousing freestyle baritone sax. The Brussels trio's grooves go blurringly hard, offset by quieter fluctuating nuances. *AC*

Bastien Keb

★★★★

The Only Angel I Ever Saw Wore Black

DEF PRESSÉ. CD/DL/LP

A dusty, dreamlike heartbreak, Keb's latest sees Kenneth Voita's dark narration joining the dots between teary funk, lysergic folk and obtuse techno on a brooding suite that plays deep into this bedsit Morricone's cinephile instincts. *AC*

Mirror Tree

★★★

Mirror Tree

INNOVATIVE LEISURE. CD/DL/LP

Debut from Michael Gold, airline pilot and Leonard Cohen's godson, opens on a waft of hello-birds-hello-trees psychedelia, crystallising into playful soulful grooves, Farfisa and Brazilian percussion underpinning his Wayne Coyne in a Panama hat vocals. *JB*

Prison

★★★★

Upstate

DRAG CITY. DL/LP

Premium-grade scuzz from a NYC basement jamming collective that includes Endless Boogie's Paul Major and the late Sam Jayne, from Love As Laughter. Freeform in approach, but the avant-rock'n'roll grooves are solid, and epic. Royal Trux fans take note. *JM*

Public Service Broadcasting

★★★★

This New Noise

TEST CARD RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Live with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Jules Buckley in 2022, the history research group consider the BBC c1922-37(-ish), and warn against privatisation. Via radio hiss and cut-glass samples of the long dead, worlds beyond are accessed. *IH*

EXTENDED PLAY

Interpol

Interpolations

MATADOR. DL

Remix albums can be tricky: too much reverence for the originals and you risk redundancy; too little of the source material and you alienate the fanbase. The producers re-imagining Interpol's 2022 LP *The Other Side Of Make-Believe* for this digital collection, walk that tightrope with grace. Makaya McCraven's redux of Big Shot City is the most subtle interpolation, paring the track back to brittle funk guitar and itchy rhythms, ceding the spotlight to Paul Banks' world-weary vocal. Elsewhere, Daniel Avery chucks most of Greenwich in the bin, recasting the remaining elements as some thrilling, nihilistic club banger, while Jeff Parker re-envisions Passenger as alienated trip-hop, his smudgy breakbeats lending new tension to Banks' alienated croon. Elsewhere, Water From Your Eyes and Jesu remake their tracks in their own image, the former twisting Something Changed into subtly disturbing quirk-pop, the latter turning Toni into a slow-motion epic of towering emotional power.

Stevie Chick

Interpol (from left, Paul Banks, Sam Fogarino, Daniel Kessler): they still believe in make-believe.

Atiba Jefferson

Emma Rawicz

★★★

Chroma

ACT. CD/DL/LP

From talking drums on Phlox to the mercurial flutes of Rangwali, this Devon-born tenor saxophonist's second leader LP is melodically astute. Although occasionally ponderous, the serpentine solos that nod to Joe Henderson and Wayne Shorter show a poise far beyond her years. *AC*

Luke Schneider

★★★★

It Is Solved By Walking

CENTRIPETAL FORCE. CD/DL/LP/MC

Pin-up boy of the ambient Americana scene, Schneider is a Nashville pedal steel op whose New Age patience makes Eno's *Apollo* soundtracks sound like a hoedown. This follow-up to 2020's *Altar Of Harmony* is only 27 minutes long; put it on a loop for maximum reverie. *JM*

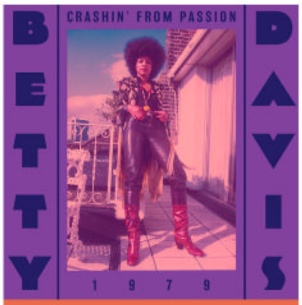
As nasty as she wanna be

To mark the 50th anniversary of her self-titled debut, four essential remastered titles from the queen of avant-funk get a well-deserved reissue. **Andrew Male** gets down.

Betty Davis

50th Anniversary Reissues

LIGHT IN THE ATTIC. CD/DL/LP



WHEN 27-YEAR-OLD Betty Davis arrived in San Francisco in 1972 to record her debut LP she'd already changed the direction of 20th century music. Of course, the most well-documented example is how this North Carolina-born songwriter, designer and model – born Betty Mabry – married Miles Davis in the autumn of 1968 and, in just a few months, reworked his entire look, sound and aesthetic, taking him to the hippest New York boutiques, playing him LPs by Hendrix, Sly Stone and Santana, getting him off drugs, insisting he go electric and changing the title of his Betty-influenced LP 'Witches Brew' to the more incendiary *Bitches Brew*. But she split from Miles after one year, fleeing from his aggressive behaviour and channelling her pain into her music. "I told no one of how Miles was violent," she said in 2018, "so I wrote and sung my heart out instead." Hooking up with a budding Alabama soul-funk outfit called The Commodores, Davis wrote a bunch of songs for them and secured a deal with Motown Records.

> "The *Betty Davis* LP is simultaneously free and dangerous."

For some, that would be enough. But not Davis. After turning down Berry Gordy's offer to work as an in-house songwriter and taking her songs with her, Betty signed to Just Sunshine, the nascent label of Woodstock organiser Michael Lang, and recorded the songs herself. Promised full artistic control and publishing rights – unprecedented for a black woman at the time – Davis hooked up with Sly And The Family Stone drummer Greg Errico. The pair brought in Santana guitarist and percussionist Neal Schon and Michael Carabello, plus future Mandrill guitarist Doug Rodrigues, former Sly bassist Larry Graham and the backing singers Sylvester, The Pointer Sisters, and Big Brother & The Holding Company's Kathi McDonald. Working as both arranger and bandleader, Davis kept rhythms tight while producer Errico pushed Davis's own off-the-beat metallic vocals high in the mix. The result was *Betty Davis* (★★★★★), an avant-garde '70s funk LP that is simultaneously free and dangerous, with transgressive, sex-positive lyrics that refuse to conform to any safe notion of early-'70s liberation.

Mel Dixon

BACK STORY: FUNKOPHILES

- With all of her studio recordings now available, the final holy grail for Betty Davis fans remains footage of her blistering July 1976 performance at the Riviera '76 Jazz-Rock music festival in Le Castellet, France. Organised by Woodstock promoter Michael Lang, it was billed as "Woodstock in Provence" and performers included Jimmy Cliff, Ray Barretto, Gil Scott-Heron, John McLaughlin, Joe Cocker and Betty Davis. A concert film was shot but never released, but an audience tape exists along with tantalising snippets of colour footage, all of which can be found on YouTube.

Although ultra-nasty stop-start funk opener If I'm In Luck I Might Get Picked Up invoked the wrath of the NAACP for what they deemed was a positive depiction of prostitution, all the tracks here possess a non-conformist attitude, both in their message of unfettered female sexuality (Walkin' Up The Road; Anti Love Song; You Won't See Me In The Morning) but also in how Davis and her singers move within the songs, stepping out of the groove (Game Is My Middle Name), running ahead of it (the almost proto-punk Steppin' In Her I Miller Shoes) or seemingly ignoring it completely (Ooh Yea).

Shunned by radio and the mainstream black media, it was perhaps inevitable that *Betty Davis* would fail to sell, but if Lang expected *They Say I'm Different* (★★★★) to cleave closer to commercial respectability he was sorely mistaken. Produced by Davis herself, with Headhunters drummer Mike Clark, Band Of Gypsys drummer Buddy Miles, guitarist Cordell Dudley, and Betty's cousin Larry Johnson on bass, *They Say...* is a raw-power, riff-heavy minimalist funk behemoth, made strange by Davis's prowling, purring, screeching vocals that are, once again, forward in the mix. The songs don't hit in quite the same way because they're not really songs, more unimpeachable riffs, grooves and jams, like the slinky clavinet grind of 70's Blues or the good-foot James Brown sleaze of Git In There, where Davis exhorts her musicians to "Get down, down, down, down in there" as she emulates the sound of a wailing guitar rising to delirious ecstasy.

After *They Say*..., Davis toured with new group Funk House, comprised of her first cousins (Johnson and drummer Nicky Neal) and their childhood friends keyboardist Fred Mills and guitarist Carlos Morales. Described by Davis's close friend Winona Williams as "unbelievably decadent [and] way ahead of [its] time", live shows saw the singer decked out in Afro-futurist Larry LeGaspi outfits, performing her slow-grinding burlesque funk workouts whilst writhing on the floor and fellating her microphone. It was, perhaps, too ahead of its time. According to a Washington Post review, "the audience stared like an army of stiffs as Davis flipped her tail about and let loose an anarchist's cry".

Despite poor sales, a Betty Davis fanbase gradually grew – most notably in San Francisco and Washington DC – and a deal with Island was struck, for which Davis and Funk House recorded two LPs, 1975's *Nasty Gal* (not part of these LITA reissues) and a second LP which, thanks to a dispute with Chris Blackwell, remained unreleased until 2009. It's hard to say what audiences would have thought of *Is It Love Or Desire* (★★★★) in 1976 but in 2023 it sounds incredible, a take-no-prisoners female-fronted Funkadelic with Davis trying everything from ecstatic Little Feat country funk (Whorey Angel) to hypnotic motorik sex jams (It's So Good), whilst aiming attacks at disco (Bottom Of The Barrel) and her own record label (Stars Starve, You Know). However, when the LP was shelved, the band split and Davis relocated to Los Angeles, immersing herself in the West Hollywood party scene before assembling her fifth and final album, 1979's *Crashin' From Passion*, now available on vinyl for the first time ever.

Recorded with Funk House guitarist Morales and jazz drummer Alphonse Mouzon, plus Herbie Hancock on keyboards, Chuck Rainey on bass and a quartet of backing vocalists comprised of Martha Reeves, Patryce Banks, and Anita and Bonnie of the Pointer Sisters, *Crashin' From Passion* (★★★) should be incredible. It isn't, but beyond such failed style experiments as the Manhattan Transfer vocal jazz of Hangin' Out In Hollywood and I've Danced Before's winsome calypso-pop can be found a haunted vulnerability on digital soul epic You Take Me For Granted and the title track where Davis sings, "Tried my best but I failed the test, made mistakes... Now you hate me."

After *Crashin'*..., Davis spent three years in Japan before moving back to her family home in Pittsburgh, where she lived in relative solitude until her death in February last year. Since those final sessions, Davis has been sampled repeatedly and cited as an influence by everyone from Prince to Janelle Monáe. Even Miles Davis in his 1989 autobiography wrote that, "If Betty were singing today, she'd be something like Madonna; something like Prince... she was ahead of her time." But perhaps influence counts for little in the face of reality. Speaking in a 2018 documentary, Betty Davis summed up her career differently: "Three albums of hard funk. I put everything there. But doors in the industry kept closing. Always white men behind desks telling me to change – change my look, change my sound. I needed to 'fit in' or else no contract. I learned stars starve in silence."

Different strokes for different folks: Betty Davis, circa 1974 – she changed the face of 20th century music.

Sparklehorse's Mark Linkous: looking out into a sad and beautiful world.

A wing and a prayer

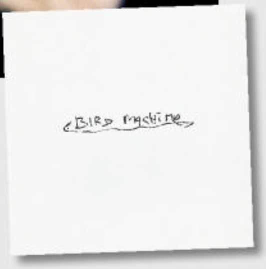
Thirteen years after Mark Linkous's death, his final recordings come to light. By Victoria Segal.

Sparklehorse

★★★★

Bird Machine

ANTI-. CD/DL/LP



SINKING SLOWLY through sedimentary layers of mellotron and pedal steel, Falling Down, the fifth song on Sparklehorse's fifth album *Bird Machine*, grapples with the weight of geological time. There are hummingbirds and quasars, mountains and forests, lost soldiers covered by river silt and all of Mark Linkous's "dead kin", whispering in his ear. "The cannonball has flown its arc now," Linkous sings, "to be found by the plough, years from now."

Thirteen years after Linkous took his life in a Knoxville alleyway at the age of 47, the plough has struck another remarkable artefact, turning the earth to reveal an album considered lost. Linkous's brother, Matt, and his sister-in-law Melissa gathered close musical associates – among them producer Alan Weatherhead and Grandaddy's Jason Lytle – to construct *Bird Machine* from 2009 recordings made with Steve Albini, home tapes and Linkous's notes, including track-listing and title.

It's a potentially treacherous act of second-guessing, yet there is no sense of uncanny AI ventriloquism here. From the scruffy fuzz of It'll Never Stop, seeing nature endure where he will not, to gently desolate autumn almanac Everybody's Gone To Sleep, these songs don't feel patchworked or soldered. While Linkous's tendencies to smudge and collapse his songs are apparent – not least the atmospheric disturbance of antique hymn O Child – so too is his generosity of songwriting spirit, positioning the bleakest sentiments in dynamic, questioning music. Evening Star Supercharger hides a brutal lyric about rail tracks and bleeding out in a cosmic echo of Love Minus Zero/No Limit. I Fucked It Up is on the nose like a bar-brawl punch – "Well I coulda been a rock'n'roll star/ But I fucked it up real good" – but it springs from the wreckage with a buoyancy that tempers the bitterness.

Being a rock star was a vexed question for Linkous, struggling for years with depression, addiction and ill-health (exacerbated by a near-death experience in a London hotel room while touring with Radiohead in 1996). While supporting R.E.M., a band member told him, "One day you'll have this"; he later said he didn't want it. If 2010's posthumously released Danger Mouse collaboration *Dark Night Of The Soul* connected him to a raft of stellar guests – Iggy Pop, The Flaming Lips – the songs on *Bird Machine* do not suggest a man making one more bid for stardom. You wouldn't cover Robyn Hitchcock And The Egyptians' dank existential mondegreen Listening To The Higsons, or anatomise loneliness as starkly as on Kind Ghosts, if you wanted that.

Instead, *Bird Machine* shows an artist still looking out into a sad and beautiful world – if his life was tipping vertiginously one way, these songs can't help but push the other. In an album of painful moments, it is closing exhalation Stay which is most painful: "Stay for the day," sings Linkous, "Oh, it's gonna get brighter."

BANANA MOON DAEVID ALLEN
ROBERT WYATT
MAGGIE BELL
GARY WRIGHT
GERRY FIELDS
BARRY ST-JOHN
ARCHIE LEGGET
45

Daevid Allen

★★★★

Banana Moon

BYG. CD/LP

Ur-hippy's Bowie-approved space-rock oddity.

"Strands of the embryonic glam style started here," wrote David Bowie in 2003 as he singled out Daevid Allen's 1971 outing *Banana Moon* for unexpected praise, likening its Day-Glo free festival clatter to "Bryan Ferry and the Spiders From Mars". Australian beatnik Allen helped to shape the underground in France after visa issues exiled him from psychedelic London, but he returned to Britain to make this set, enlisting heavy friends like Robert Wyatt (who sings dolorous Soft Machine fave Memories here). Bowie's glittery parallel holds on side one; It's The Time Of Your Life is Paperback Writer via the New York Dolls, while those falsettos on White Neck Blooze are pure Satellite Of Love. Side two's absurdist freak-outs, meanwhile, pre-empt the Alfred Jarry mayhem of Gong's *Camembert Electrique*, released a matter of months later. Aggressively quirky, but hunky dory at its core.

Jim Wirth

Neko Case

★★★★

Wild Creatures

ANTI. CD/DL/LP

Country noir singer-songwriter cleverly compiled.

Neko Case's moment in the sun, when 2009's *Middle Cyclone* went Top 3 in the United States, was brief, but the New Pornographers singer had been building a sterling solo catalogue since 1997. The non-chronological *Wild Creatures* comprises 22 grown-up, immaculately produced old songs covering all her studio albums other than the covers-heavy debut *The Virginian*, plus the new, brief, initially acoustic, ultimately explosive Oh, Shadowless. She nods to new wave and Patti Smith almost as much as to country and to Americana, but she's her own woman. In a fairer world, Lady Pilot would have been a huge pop hit, while Man rocks hard and Furnace Room Lullaby was her first great murder ballad. And when she sighs, "I leave the party at 3am/Alone, thank God," on Hold On, Hold On, she encapsulates hedonistic weariness like few others.

John Aizlewood

Glenda Collins

★★★★

Baby It Hurts – The Holloway Road Sessions, 1963-1966

CHERRY RED. CD

Joe Meek protégée's flop singles and Mod makeover.

GLENDA COLLINS
BABY IT HURTS
JOE MEEK'S
Tea Chest Tapes

Between 1963 and '66, Glenda Collins with producer Joe Meek recorded eight singles and a wealth of unissued material, much of which is rounded up on this top value 3-CD anthology. The singles are typical Meek fare featuring whirring melodies, weedy organ, echo and lyrics employing fairgrounds as metaphor. They are all great, but the real thrill comes with the inclusion of an unearthed session recorded with the Mod/freakbeat group, The Riot Squad. Intended as the basis for an album with the pairing billed as Glenda, Nero & The Riots (Nero being the nickname of The Riot Squad's lead singer Keith Gladman), it recasts Collins as a soul singer and an expressive one at that, on exuberant covers including Dancing In The Street, Mockingbird and Can I Get A Witness.

Lois Wilson

Johnny's Uncalled Four

★★★

The Lost Album

WICK. CD/LP

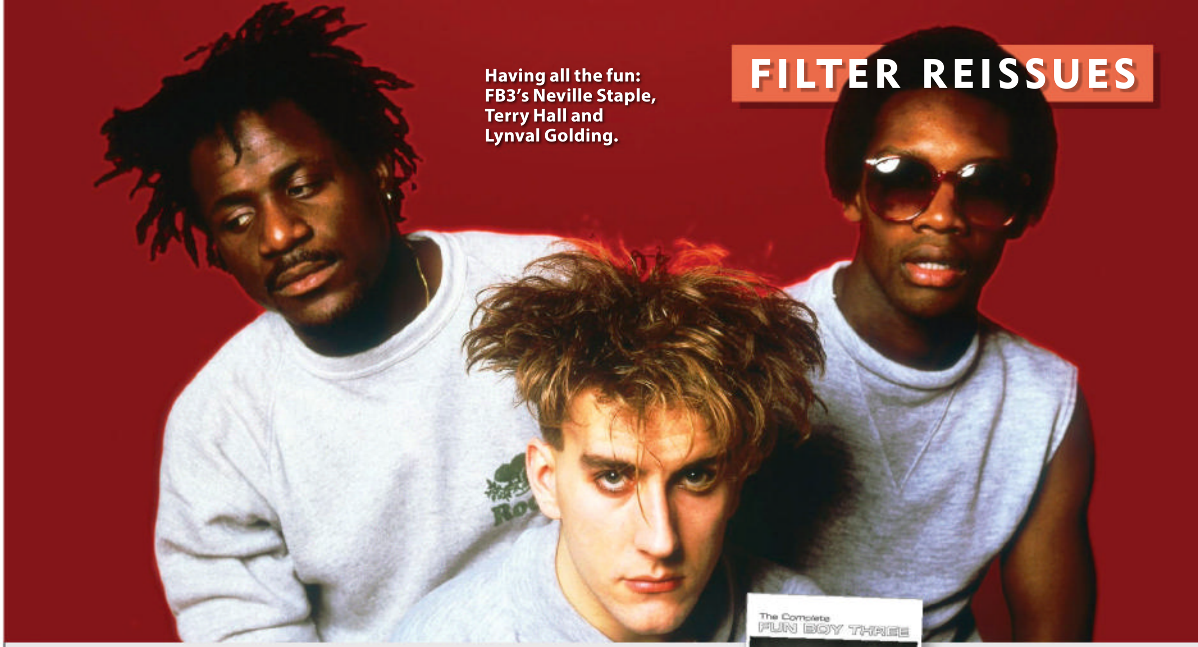
Sixties US beat combo finally receive an LP release.

Since the late 1960s, John Golden has had a distinguished career in California as a record mastering engineer, but he started out a musician. Johnny's Uncalled Four were an Ohio band who played over 200 shows, splitting in 1965 because of the military draft and leaving behind a pair of now rare 45s. Driven along by the powerhouse drumming of Dennis Beery, the covers here give a good flavour of the influences of such regional bands at the time – Link Wray's Jack The Ripper, Glad All Over by the Dave Clark Five or The Ventures' instrumental take on House Of The Rising Sun – interspersed with originals like Daydream, a fine instrumental clearly indebted to Santo & Johnny. Performances and sound are excellent, but given the 1964-65 recording dates, quite why they're billed here as "post-Elvis, pre-British Invasion" is hard to fathom.

Max Décharné

Johnny's Uncalled Four
The Lost Album
WICK

Danny Clinch



Having all the fun: FB3's Neville Staple, Terry Hall and Lynval Golding.

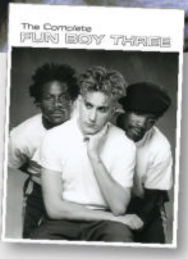
Fun Boy Three

★★★★

The Complete Fun Boy Three

CHRYSALIS. CD/DVD

Lavishly packaged studio recordings, live performance, radio sessions and outtakes from Terry Hall's brilliant second act.



FORTY YEARS on from their split, the Fun Boy Three still live in the shadow of Terry Hall, Lynval Golding and Neville Staple's former band The Specials, but as this terrific 5-CD plus DVD box set shows, in their two-year 1981-83 existence, they were visionaries in their own right, expanding chart pop's vocabulary with every hit. Debut single The Lunatics (Have Taken Over The Asylum) blends African percussion with left-wing politics; gorgeous swansong Our Lips Are Sealed was co-penned by Hall and the Go-Go's' Jane Wiedlin about their brief love affair. Live, meanwhile, as 1983's thrilling concert at the Regal Theatre in Hitchin bears witness, they were raw, energetic and still connecting with a post-punk audience.

Lois Wilson

Stevie Nicks

★★★★

Complete Studio Albums & Rarities

RHINO. CD/DL/LP

An in-depth look at the self-styled 'Welsh witch's' spell book.

In Fleetwood Mac, Stevie Nicks' emotive, diary-entry songs often needed more help to be fully realised than those of Lindsey Buckingham and Christine McVie. A strength, actually, as she began hatching solo debut *Bella Donna* during the sessions for *Tusk*, beckoning in trusted, hand-picked collaborators such as Tom Petty and Don Henley. This 10-CD, 16-LP box set charts the immediate, stratospheric and sustained solo success that eluded Nicks' Mac confrères. From the romantic *Sturm und Drang* of *Bella Donna* and *The Wild Heart* through to 2001's Sheryl Crow-assisted *Trouble In Shangri-La* – by which point Nicks' adored matriarch status was clear – the quality control rarely dips. Turns out the rarities here aren't that rare, but Stevie's Tom Petty, Warren Zevon and Buffalo Springfield covers charm, and My Heart, written around an instrumental demo gifted by Mike Campbell, is a gem.

James McNair

Old And New Dreams

★★★★

Old And New Dreams

LUMINESSENCE. LP

Ornette Coleman alumni reinterpret and add to his early repertoire on 1979's self-titled second LP.

Don Cherry, Dewey Redman, Charlie Haden and Ed Blackwell were established leaders when they convened as Old And New Dreams, a bebop subversion that revelled in tonal dissonance and emotive harmonics. It's epitomised by a re-imagined Lonely Woman (first tracked on Coleman's *The Shape Of Jazz To Come*), a great study in solitude driven by Haden's intense bass flurries and a spirited flourish of sorrowful melody. While Coleman's twisty trademarks pervade the tricky lines of Open Or Close, four originals are no slouch either: Cherry's high-register histrionics (Guinea) and Redman's space age musette (Orbit Of La Ba) treading more worldly waters. The pick is Haden's spilling narrative drama Song For The Whales, a reminder of Coleman's acute ear for innovative collaborators.

Andy Cowan

Sandwell District

★★★★

Feed Forward

MUTE. DL/LP

Landmark 2010 LP synthesises techno's finest sub-movements.

Considered of the finest techno albums of the 21st century, *Feed Forward* was available in limited vinyl numbers on its 2010 release. In the years since, club techno's prevailing sound has become increasingly and reductively strident – a breathless amphetamine rush compared to Sandwell District's brawny but sensual grooves. The work of an Atlantic-spanning quartet – Brits Regis and Female, Americans Silent Servant and Function – *Feed Forward*'s timelessness comes from tying together the genre's richest strands. Sandwell District mixed a tough UK aesthetic with Basic Channel-style dubbiness and plentiful references to the deep, stripped-down approach of Detroit's founding practitioners. Perhaps more than any other techno album, *Feed Forward* helped define the sound of its most notable club, Berlin's Berghain. And yet, influenced as much by industrial and post-punk as Sandwell District's techno forebears, it was equally effective as home listening. Dark, paranoid and seductive, this new three-LP box set proves that its heft hasn't diminished by a single ounce.

Stephen Worthy

Maalem Mahmoud Gania

★★★★

Colours Of The Night

HIVE MIND. DL/LP

Necessary reissue of the final studio recordings from Morocco's Gnawa king.

Mahmoud Gania was the master of Gnawa, Morocco's ritualistic urban folk music which combines poetic chants, dancing drums and the eerie rhythmic patterns of the guimbri three-stringed lute: said to invoke supernatural entities called mluks that possesses the Gnawa participant with a dervish-like energy that can cure them of all psychological and physical pain. Sceptics might cast doubt on such beliefs until they actually hear this astonishing music. Gania's final recording, captured at Casablanca's Studio Plein Les Oreilles in 2013, two years before his death, is a transportive, uplifting and infectious joy, replete with rumbling rhythms, soulful chants, deep drones and soothing call-and-response cries. From the rippling, relentless growl of Sadati Houma El Bouhala to the impassioned soul-cries of album closer Mrahba Baba Hamouda, here are 71 intimate minutes of hypnotic dusk-fire power that will leave you feeling healed and restored.

Andrew Male

Serge Gainsbourg

★★★★★

L'Homme À Tête De Chou

WRASSE/MERCURY. CD/DL/LP

Serge: half man, half vegetable.

By 1976, Gainsbourg had his shtick down pat: surrealist, spoken-word prog-rock concept albums recorded with the cream of British sessioneers (led by Alan Hawkshaw). In this instance, we follow a tabloid journalist who becomes besotted then goes mad, killing his lover Marilou with a fire extinguisher. If that sounds a bit downmarket, it was influenced by a 16th century Dutch folk tale warning against being dissatisfied with your looks, which had inspired the statue in Serge's garden, Claude Lallan's Man With A Cabbage Head. It is its creator's second masterpiece in five years, a worthy rival to *Histoire De Melody Nelson* and a peculiarly French bridge between Roxy Music and Pulp. For this definitive version, you also get the instrumental tracks – rarely can insanity have been so vividly played – and alternative versions, while the CD/DVD combo adds immersive mixes.

David Hutcheon

Sonic Youth

★★★★

Live In Brooklyn 2011

SILVER CURRENT. CD/DL/LP

New York's premier noisers did not go gently into that good night.

Sonic Youth's untimely demise was especially gutting, as the 21st century had witnessed some of their finest music yet (2002's jams-laden *Murray Street*; the bruised pop of 2006's *Rather Ripped*). However, this immaculate document of their final US concert mostly eschews that late-period tear in favour of what Thurston Moore describes as a "super-deep" setlist skewed towards the tenebrous psychedelia of their *Bad Moon Rising* era, their caustic no wave roots and even the more obscure corners of their Geffen years. The result is a thrilling 90-minute swansong, the highlights of which – an atom-splitting I Love Her All The Time, the ambient/industrial chiaroscuro of Ghost Bitch, Starfield Road's fierce aural firework, the Dick-Dale-goes-apocalyptic tornado that is Death Valley 69 – prove there was still limitless potential within their ever-thrilling fusion of pop song form and avant garde technique. Remember them this way.

Stevie Chick

Brian Aris

John & Beverley Martyn, whipping up a *Storm*... together in 1970.

Estate of Keith Morris/Getty Images

Lucifer rising

Jazz-folk fiend's rise to power, on four separate heavyweight vinyl reissues. By Jim Wirth.

John Martyn

London Conversation

★★★

The Tumbler

★★★

John & Beverley Martyn

Stormbringer!

★★★

The Road To Ruin

★★★★

PROPER/UMC. LP

JOHN MARTYN...THE TUMBLER

REMEMBERING JOHN MARTYN, his sometime acquaintance from the 1960s folk scene, the Incredible String Band's Robin Williamson said: "He had a handsome fresh face which he later managed to destroy completely." A boyish 18 when he left Glasgow, Martyn didn't complete his Jekyll & Hyde switch from blond cherub to snarling, menacing, jazz-folk demon until the early 1970s, but these vinyl reissues of his first four records capture his determined efforts to lose his innocence.

Recorded within months of his arrival in the big city, 1967's callow *London Conversation* showcases Martyn's Davy Graham guitar skills and gigantic debt to the Incredible String Band, the sitar-spattered Rolling Home a cutesy dead giveaway. Jazz flautist Harold McNair decorated follow-up *The Tumbler*, but Martyn was still struggling to summon his own voice. Impish closer Seven Black Roses raises the stakes slightly, but he might have run out of chances to get it right had he not met Beverley Kutner.

A veteran of several singles, she was already signed to Joe Boyd's Witchseason productions when she married Martyn in April 1969 (a decision she would later come to regret). Sent to Woodstock to record what was initially meant to be her own record (with The Band's Levon Helm among the big bucks supporting cast), she and John returned with *Stormbringer!* – effectively a cut'n'shut of two solo records, with John taking six tracks to Beverley's four. Hers are tentative and quirky, his have a weather-eye for the *Big Pink* sound, and – on Traffic-Light Lady and Would You Believe Me? – a certain rogue-ish charm.

The duo returned to London to make *The Road To Ruin*, a Brit-jazz supporting cast helping to darken the mood. Beverley's gaunt celebration of north London bohemia Primrose Hill is very much its signature tune, but if the Martyns sound like a couple on Give Us A Ring, John's lone wolf instincts pointed the way forward. His esses blur into zeds for the last time on the spindly intro to the title track, an echoey production job hinting at something dark and powerful about to be unleashed.

So it proved. Beverley's career got trapped behind the pram in the hall, while John perfected his Echoplex guitar sound, his bromance with stand-up bassist Danny Thompson producing the visionary squall of *Inside Out*, *Solid Air* and *One World*, and signposting his own road to ruin. He died in 2009, aged 60, but given his alcoholism, drug use and knack for making enemies, the end might have come much sooner.

These records can only hint at what lay ahead for the curly-haired pup in double denim on the sleeve of *London Conversation*. They are pretty but guileless, prototypes abandoned on the way to Martyn's personal big bang. However naturally it came to him, beauty was never really his thing.

Never in the shade: The Breeders, 1993 (from left) Kim Deal, Kelley Deal, Jim MacPherson, Josephine Wiggs.

The Breeders

★★★★

Last Splash

4AD. LP

Landmark indie record spits in the wishing well again for its 30th birthday.

ORIGINALLY CONCEIVED as Kim Deal's side-hustle, The Breeders took on a different weight after Black Francis dissolved Pixies in 1993. This serendipitous follow-up to 1990's Kurt Cobain-approved *Pod* was there to neutralise the sting, the scattershot art-pop of Cannonball landing a game-changing direct hit. A decade after the 20th anniversary celebrations of *LSXX* comes this vinyl 'original analog edition' reissue, remastered from tapes long believed to be lost. The core songs remain gloriously idiosyncratic – zombie girl-group pop, collaged college rock, cool hulas – delivered with inimitable insouciance by Deal, her identical twin Kelley, bassist Josephine Wiggs and drummer Jim MacPherson. There are additions from the vaults: the all-climax-all-the-time Go Man Go (a rare Deal/Black Francis co-write), and Divine Mascis, a version of Divine Hammer with Dinosaur Jr's frontman on typically horizontal vocals. In the '90s alt-rock pantheon, it's still never in the shade.

Victoria Segal

the Breeders
Last Splash

Aselefech Ashine & Getenesh Kebret

★★★★

Beauties

MISSISSIPPI. DL/LP

Ethiopian jazz classic, just before the lights went out on Addis Ababa's nightlife.

Released on Kaifa Records in 1976 but unseen since then, this is a gem from the very final days of swinging Addis Ababa – the curtain came down on Ethiopian nightlife and entertainment shortly after its recording, with few copies reaching the streets and those that did immediately snapped up to be kept safe and secret. Neither of the two female singers would make another record and both have spent this century watching on as others were rediscovered via the *Éthiopiques* series; the musicians backing them, the Army Band, led by the busy writer and arranger Teshome Sissay, would henceforth have to concentrate on their day jobs. Unsurprisingly for music from the final days of Ethiopia's golden years, it packs everything you want into its 10 tracks: funky bass, snaking sax, glorious piano runs, high-pitched close harmonies. The girls keep swinging.

David Hutcheon

Various

★★★★

King Jammy: Cries From The Youth

GREENSLEEVES. CD/LP

Revolutionary digital sounds from the King of Jamaican dancehall.

When JA producer/King Tubby apprentice Lloyd James recorded Wayne Smith's Under Me Sleng Teng in his tiny Waterhouse studio in 1985, the digital-driven rhythm changed reggae for ever. Overnight, 'Jammy' went from Prince to King and became the undisputed ruler of the dancehall for the rest of the decade. Reggae traditionalists were appalled but, as this top-tier 32-track (on CD) collection attests, these raw, rudimentary Casiotone grooves provided the ideal backdrop for expressive wailing from such roots heroes as Dennis Brown (Up-Full One), Junior Delgado (Storm Is Coming) and Junior Murvin (the ever-relevant World Inflation). Less well-known 'youths' accentuate the comical side of the genre – Bunny General's properly insane Fuck Fowl; Little Twitch's lyrically questionable Bucket-A-Shit – while Super Cat's inventive wordplay on rougher-than-rough Sleng Teng version Trash And Ready captures the super-charged energy of vintage digi-dancehall.

Simon McEwen

Kevin Westenberg

Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons

★★★★★

Working Our Way Back To You: The Ultimate Collection

MADFISH. CD

Forty-four discs, one LP, one huge slice of American pop history.

It's hard to overstate Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons' influence on the sound and business of popular music. This mammoth, beautifully presented labour of love details their harmony-laden pre-Beatles beginnings, an evolution into the musically sophisticated social concern years (1969's magnificent *The Genuine Imitation Life Gazette* was an East Coast *Pet Sounds*), a '70s comeback when all seemed lost and a rather unfairly unheralded '80s. Today, not only does 89-year-old Valli still tour, but he married for the fourth time in June. Not all the 800+ songs here covering The Four Seasons and Valli solo are peerless (1965's fake live album *Recorded Live On-Stage* is a nadir), but with Valli and chief songwriter/producer Bob Gaudio (like Brian Wilson he refused to tour) at the centre of almost everything, there's continuity and remarkably consistent quality control. Dozens of extra tracks make everything more special.

John Aizlewood

Various

★★★★

Gespensterland

BUREAU B. CD/DL/LP

Compendium of underground German acts exploring folklore via experimental electronica.

Made up of previously unreleased tracks, *Gespensterland* shines a light on a little-heard, spooked German underground, working below the radar on mostly small-run releases. Lower Franconia's Baldruin lays the mystery on thick, his fevered tracks here using flutes, electric organs and shaken children's toys to create an opaque ambience. Close neighbours Brannten Schnüre voyage into similarly uncharted territory, providing laceworks of fragile folk melodies and slooshes of breathy drone offset by detached vocals. Like Brothers Grimm armed with analogue synths, Freundliche Kreisel supply the title track's sinister fairy tale, while the oblique textures of Kirschstein's mystically-themed efforts betray roots in Amon Düül's hallucinogenic psychedelia and Nový Svět's neo surrealism. A very dark delight.

Andy Cowan

The Folk Implosion

★★★★

Music For Kids

DOMINO. CD/DL/LP

Lou Barlow's soundtrack for controversial 1995 film re-emerges into adulthood.

After being "bombarded with fan letters" by scriptwriter Harmony Korine, Sebadoh's Lou Barlow agreed to provide the soundtrack for director Larry Clark's notorious 1995 state-of-the-teen-nation address Kids. Constructed by Barlow and John Davis, his multi-instrumentalist partner in The Folk Implosion, these songs wobble along the then-modish grooves between indie rock and club culture (no surprise UNKLE remix the album's ominous hit Natural One here). On their way, the pair capture a real sense of dank dread, Simean Groove's wolf howls, the reality-glitch of Checking In and Nothing Gonna Stop's relentless beats all suffused in a cold sweat. Even the bratty punk squall of Daddy Never Understood breaks down into an experimental mellotron surge, while NASA Theme (conceived for a club scene) is a full-on detour into techno abstraction. Inappropriately, given the film's bleak conclusions about the youth of the day, it's aged very well.

Victoria Segal

The Southern University Jazz Ensemble

★★★

Live At The 1971 American College Jazz Festival

NOW-AGAIN. DL/LP

Private press LP from college band conducted by clarinettist/teacher Alvin Batiste.

Along with 1973's *Goes To Africa With Love* (also reissued this month) these souvenir recordings were never intended for wider listening, but a record of avant-garde jazz clarinettist Alvin Batiste's skill in transforming rookies such as Henry Butler, Herman Jackson and Julius Farmer into confident career musicians. Caught in full stride at an Alabama showcase, Farmer's elastic bass steals the show on a stripped-back cover of Miles Davis's So What, while Batiste neatly dovetails with Kirk Ford's tenor sax on John Coltrane's Tunji. The standout is eight-minute Batiste original North American Idiosyncrasy. Written for Cannonball Adderley while completing his master's degree, it's a wild ride through blues idioms via Coltrane's A Love Supreme, shrieking trumpets and darting counter melodies. It's worth the entrance fee alone.

Andy Cowan

Keep on shining: The House Of Love, 1988 (from left) Terry Bickers, Chris Groothuizen, Guy Chadwick, Pete Evans.

FILE UNDER...

Hyper inflation

As British 'indie' mutated into 'alternative rock', it kept pumping itself up. What could possibly go wrong? By **Jim Irvin.**

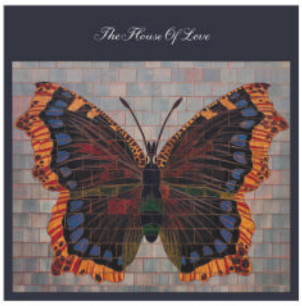
WHEN THE House Of Love released their self-titled debut on Creation in 1988, they caught the tail-end of the UK indie boom with a recipe that was easy to like if you liked that sort of thing. Frontman Guy Chadwick was a decent bedsit poet in the post-Bowie/Velvets mould, who you could imagine being envious of Lloyd Cole earlier in the decade. Now pushing 30, he was more than ready for his close-up. Shine On, Destroy The Heart and Christine were lo-fi enough to satisfy the genre's requirements and pushy enough to suggest this was a gang we might wish to follow.

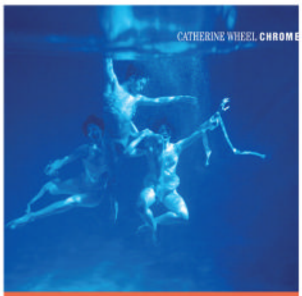
The Smiths and Depeche Mode sold many, many records immediately, but if you weren't them, the '80s indie business model barely kept acts off the dole. Chadwick and co needed to take the major label shilling. They signed with eccentric A&R man Dave Bates's buzzy Polygram offshoot, Fontana. And then things went wrong. New priorities and pressures pulled the band apart. The recording process was convoluted and stressful. Mercurial guitarist Terry Bickers left acrimoniously as they hit the road to promote their Fontana debut (also self-titled, confusingly, though sometimes known as 'Fontana'). A re-rub of earlier single Shine On was a hit, but other singles struggled to connect. Revolving door management, and the impact of 'made-it' levels of booze and drugs did not help. The album seemed to do well, but by the time the follow-ups appeared, the band's target audience had wandered off towards acid-house, grunge or whatever else was happening.

New reissues of those three Fontana albums, via Proper, reveal each to be solid collections that actually improve as they go. The only clues to the band's dilemma are a co-production credit for label boss Bates on *Babe Rainbow* – suddenly they sound like The Charlatans on You Don't Understand – and 1993's post-grunge *Audience With The Mind* turns up the guitars. It's a classic puzzle for acts who take the plunge into the mainstream: do you follow the tide, swim against it or tread water? The House Of Love tried all three. When allowed to sound like themselves (eg, The Girl With The Loneliest Eyes) they shine on. These albums certainly require cherry-picking, but Chadwick's best songs retain the ability to exert a tight grip on the right listener.

Fellow Fontana signings Catherine Wheel served up frontman Rob Dickinson's full-fibre songs as super-heavy shoegaze. For debut album *Ferment* (1992), former Talk Talk producer Tim Friese Greene created a Wheel of Sound; almost the exact opposite of Talk Talk's measured emptiness, every space filled with sparks. There's an extraordinary guitar squall at the end of a song named, deceptively, Bill And Ben. There are periods of calm too; the afterglow half of Black Metallic and the middle-distance crawl of the title song, until it too bursts into flame. I recall *Ferment* being a bit much to consume in one sitting at the time and I stand by that; nonetheless, this is powerful music. Follow-ups *Chrome* and *Happy Days* explored Pixies-like intensity and metallic rock. Only timing, and possibly labelling, was against them. Having to choose a lane and stick to it is really disabling for any band.

Also from the decade when conscious racket was all the rage, The Boo Radleys' *Giant Steps* (Two-Piers), is out again in numerous formats with additional material. This group always struck me as a collaboration between sledgehammer and nut; singer Sice's modest delivery frequently subsumed by Martin Carr's super-zealous compositions. It made sense at the time, but now leaves me cold. However, the press release reminds me this was NME's 1993 Album Of The Year, there's a shoegaze renaissance on, and multiple modern organs hail *Giant Steps* as a masterpiece, so if you feel so inclined, dive into the eye of its pop-crazed storm.





> **"Chadwick's best songs retain the ability to grip the right listener."**

Steve Double/Camera Press

Key lesson

The High Priestess of soul in a stunning newly discovered performance from 1966.
By David Fricke.

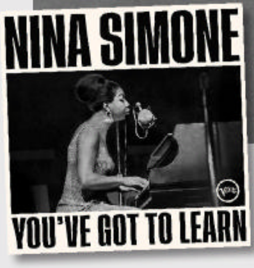
Nina Simone

★★★★

You've Got To Learn

VERVE. CD/DL/LP

Nina Simone: "weaver of spells" and an ascendant phenomenon in 1966.



ON THE second day of the 1966 Newport Jazz Festival, singer Nina Simone barely got a half-hour onstage amid the crush of titans: Stan Getz, Horace Silver and Thelonious Monk; saxophonist Charles Lloyd's hot new group with pianist Keith Jarrett; John Coltrane in epic Fire Music form with extra molten horn from Ferrell (not yet Pharoah) Sanders. But it was Simone, at 33 a still-ascendant phenomenon, who got the first standing ovation of the weekend, according to John S Wilson in the New York Times.

"She is… a weaver of spells" with "a feeling for the jazz musician's manner of attack," Wilson raved in his review of her July 2 performance, released on this album for the first time. Leading a nimble trio of guitar, bass and drums, Simone "lulls you one moment and leaps at you the next," he went on, "always keeping [the audience] just a little off balance." Billboard, in its own gushing report, noted that Simone was "unable to get off" after her last number, called back for an encore by "yells of 'more, more, more!'"

You hear that spontaneous combustion throughout *You've Got To Learn*, an extraordinary document of the High Priestess on the verge of coronation, already flashing the regal will and challenge that would become a signature of her fame. "I don't trust anybody any more," Simone sings fiercely in Mississippi Goddam, her 1964 response to the racist killing in the Jim Crow South and a song that grew in force and rage the longer she waited for justice and respect. And in the encore, Simone commands absolute silence, snapping at an over exultant fan ("Shut up, shut up!") before playing Music For Lovers, a ballad about the redemptive power in a song.

You've Got To Learn is named after the opening number, a 1961 single by Charles Aznavour and, on this occasion, obviously the sound-check. Simone slowly moves forward in the mix, through the melancholy walk of her band, in an emotional seesaw of hope and resignation. Screams and applause greet I Loves You, Porgy, Simone's Top 20 breakthrough in 1959, heightened here with a wordless heartbreak of sultry, urgent scatting.

Six months after Newport, Simone cut the bulk of her classic 1967 LP, *Nina Simone Sings The Blues*. But in a thrilling preview of Blues For Mama, written with Abbey Lincoln, Simone takes the festival to Chicago's South Side in a vocal as furious as her hammer-on-anvil piano before rolling into the pure field holler of Be My Husband – driving Newport wild with just a beat, the fire in her singing and the promise of what's going to happen "if I ever catch you being untrue". A lot of great jazz was played at Newport in 1966. This is the sound of Nina Simone turning into legend.

© CEA-Cache Agency

CHROME DREAMS NEIL YOUNG

Neil Young

★★★★

Chrome Dreams

REPRISE. CD/DL/LP

Another great lost Neil album gets its official debut.

Neil Young, as every fan now assembling another IKEA shelfing unit knows, doesn't do barren periods, but in the mid-'70s his output hit overload. *Chrome Dreams* – 12 songs recorded in 1974-76, more than half of them out-and-out classics – was mastered and ready to follow *Zuma* (1975) and *Long May You Run* (1976). Then Young did a last-minute switch, releasing *American Stars 'N Bars* (1977). The two LPs share four of its songs and several more appear on later records. But hearing this in its entirety 45 years on, it really is up there with Young's greats. Highlights include the brilliant original solo version of Powderfinger; early takes with original lyrics of Sedan Delivery and Hold Back The Tears; glorious seven-minute Will To Love; fiery Hurricane; bare, voice-and-guitar Pocahontas; and Stringman, Young at the piano with another borrowed tune he took from the Stones.

Sylvie Simmons

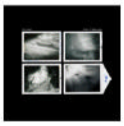
John Fahey

★★★

Proofs & Refutations

DRAG CITY. DL/LP

The voice of the Turtle? American Primitive sings from beyond the grave.



Separated from his third wife and in poor health, cerebral guitar voyager John Fahey was barely subsisting in a boarding house in Salem, Oregon, in the early 1990s when a new wave of interest in his idiosyncratic steel-strung acoustic sound (thank you Sonic Youth, Jim O'Rourke) brought him back from the brink. However, as this cache of pieces recorded at home in 1995 and 1996 reveals, the resurrected 'Blind Joe Death' was a wilder, weirder artist than ever before. Originally spread across a double-78 package, Morning and Evening, Not Night showcase a more abstract, unhurried sound while Fahey sings (unsettlingly) on All The Rains and groans monstrously on the *Tago Mago*-friendly F For Fake and closer Untitled (w/o Rain), which feels like Pere Ubu's *Dub Housing* turned inside out. Marvel gently at Fahey's questing spirit but pity his neighbours.

Jim Wirth

Burt Bacharach

★★★

Dream Big! The First Decade Of Songs

CHERRY RED. CD

The first steps towards greatness.

BURT BACHARACH DREAM BIG!

When pianist, jobbing arranger and would-be composer Burt Bacharach left the US army in 1952, he assigned himself to the coalface, working with Vic Damone and, while cranking out songs at the Brill Building, Marlene Dietrich. These three CDs (plus a jazzy, Brazilian, classical fourth of presumed influences) cover Bacharach's post-army decade where he met Hal David, discovered Dionne Warwick singing on his and Bob Hilliard's Drifters B-side Mexican Divorce, and prepared to change pop music. There's hack work, of course – those seeking greatness in Sherry Parsons' Peggy's In The Pantry will seek long and fruitlessly – but there's Perry Como's magic Magic Moments, less heralded gems such as The Four Coins' Wendy Wendy, John Ashley's outlaw tale The Hangman and a swashbuckling arrangement of Dietrich's German version of Pete Seeger's Where Have All The Flowers Gone?. The future was here, albeit in patches.

John Aizlewood

Pete Townshend/ Ronnie Lane

★★★★

Rough Mix

UMC. DL/LP

Half-speed mastered, 180-gram vinyl reissue of '77 gem; Townshend's 1980 *Empty Glass* receives similar treatment.

The old guard are adrift, punk is erupting and amid the ugly confusion comes this little beauty. With The Who struggling with Keith Moon's ill-health and Ronnie Lane bailing out of a Small Faces reunion, Pete Townshend opted to produce a Plonk solo LP, which then evolved into a full-blown, 50/50 (ish) collaboration abetted by other artistically frustrated old friends – Eric Clapton, Charlie Watts, Ian Stewart. Cue a patchwork LP studded with rootsy jewels that might arguably have been better employed in a grander setting (though, for Lane, one wonders what that may have been): Ronnie's characteristically misty April Fool and Annie; Pete's gold-standard My Baby Gives It Away, Keep Me Turning and Heart To Hang On To. These priceless, unrepeatable sessions were disrupted by Lane's aggressive mood swings – a result of his then undiagnosed MS that would sadly make this his penultimate studio outing.

Pat Gilbert

Holy alliance: Family Of God's Chris Brick (left) and Adam Peters.

Deity deeds

Top of this month's anti-matter hit parade of the lost, a psychic mixtape plays…

Family Of God

Family Of God

SELF-RELEASED, 1996

MUSICIAN AND arranger Adam Peters has multiple credits the MOJO reader will know, from Echo & The Bunnymen's *Ocean Rain* and The Triffids' *Born Sandy Devotional* to work with Beth Orton, Mercury Rev, Nick Laird-Clowes and others. One that probably won't be as familiar is 1996's debut double LP by the Family Of God, self-released in an edition of 1,000 copies, which he recorded in New York with Merthyr-born style sage Chris Brick.

Originally from Croydon, Peters had been resident in NY since 1991 after going there to work with Lloyd Cole. Two years later he re-established contact with Brick, whose late-'80s London warehouse parties, and Soho clothes shop Demob, he had frequented. The two began sharing their broad and outré tastes in music – playlists included children's music, Lebanese singer Mayada, the Tijuana Brass' *Whipped Cream & Other Delights* and Israeli disco – and playing it to the customers at Brick's boutique Smylonylon on Lafayette Street.

"It was weird shit, before the term 'crate digging' existed," says Peters. "We were listening to stuff that was considered 'wrong,' but in it we found an aesthetic that we found to be right. Chris's clothing store was an experimental place, and we'd watch people come in with this quizzical look at what was playing, and then you'd see them get it. That's how we started making the album. Because we clicked in a really good way, I said, Let's start a band, see what happens, and have a fucking laugh. We'd put tracks on a cassette and try it at the shop…"

Peters remembers the two working in the summer of 1995 at his apartment on Christopher Street. "It was fucking hot – I didn't have an air conditioner," he remembers. "We made it on an 8-track machine, I had my keyboards and my guitars, my cello, there were no computers involved." (Sleevenotes also refer to "two samplers… mighty mini Moog… junior Juno… the friendliest Farfisa in town".) They later relocated to Smylonylon itself.

At more than 90 minutes and 22 instrumental and vocal tracks (both members sing), the electro-acoustic experience that resulted is a large meal to digest. It can seem like co-existing multiple albums, complementary yet different, each one accessing ripe psychological states. There is delicate sunshine pop with gathering shadows, twisted muzak for the screen of the mind, novelty Moog blooping and irradiated exotica. Elsewhere Barrett-esque unease descends, as when folky lullaby 2nd Touch evokes Freudian dread, and psychedelic grotesque Archie Pow revisits childhood trauma. Blissful and numbed ("dirty old blanket, wrapped round my mind"), Dr Breeze takes this latter sound into chiming, deep-pile Andrew Weatherall territory. At other times, Brick attacks still-pertinent facets of '90s life in loud, accented hectoring, like a lysergically altered salesman-orator: confusingly for anyone except British listeners of a certain age, Babble namechecks Sir Harry Secombe alongside Oprah Winfrey, Rupert Murdoch and Johnny Rotten.

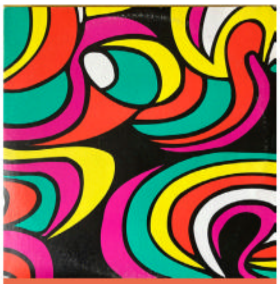
Still it goes on, moulding, remaking and inverting, sparking off John Kennedy Toole's A Confederacy Of Dunces for the ranting Teenage Beach Musical ("on the yellow nylon couch, your mind is warped"), winding back to when we were single-celled ocean life in All Atoms Are Engaged To Get Married, reflecting on info-overload and non-existence on Playing In The Dark and, seemingly, witnessing Christ going to Calvary on hushed closer Everything Is Fixed. On examination the record appears to be simultaneously microscopic and huge: there are repeated references to God, and the Devil.

"It's all over the place," says Peters. "We'd do something really dark or something really light and stupid, like it came from a cartoon… to you, it's weird. To me, it's not weird, it's heartfelt and really fucking genuine."

With admiring notices in the New York Times, the years that followed saw the Family Of God host live happenings with a full band: one East Village hall was completely wrapped in Mickey Mouse fabric and lit by three oil wheels, with Brick improvising lyrics and Northern soul dancing. One Thanksgiving dinner they threw brought together street derelicts and high-end fashion snobs. "That was beautiful," says Peters, "Real dirt, mixed with real high art." Cheltenham indie label Ochre gave the album a CD release in 1998: two more FOG LPs followed, the last in 2000, but as Peters says, "they're not as distilled as this."

Noting that he's recently been in touch with Brick to discuss a new Family Of God project, Peters remains confident in their first LP. "I've only felt like that with three things in my life," he says, now a successful composer for television and film, resident in Topanga outside Los Angeles. "This, the early Bunnymen stuff, and the stuff that I did with Dave [McComb] with The Triffids. Because me and Chris just conceived the whole thing and did it… we were just living in our own bubble and we saw it as, like, messages to the future. It's just honest expression, the same as someone painting a picture thousands of years ago on the wall of a cave… the process was purely magical to me, that's why I love it. It was fucking fun. We were on a real trip."

Ian Harrison



"We saw it as messages to the future."

ADAM PETERS

CREDITS

Tracks: Goodnight Piccadilly/Moog Over Easy/Moog River/Teenage Beach Musical/Sabrina/2nd Touch/Family Of God/Tynynyny Raindrops/You Miserable English Creep/Black And White Universe/Duck Style/Nirvana/Why Gogo Up There?/Dr. Breeze/Babble/Watch With Mother/Ark Angelika/Archie Pow/America/Playing In The Dark/All Atoms Are Engaged To Get Married/Everything Is Fixed

Personnel: Adam Peters (singer, instruments), Chris Brick (singer), Sagat Guirey (guitar on You Miserable English Creep)

Producer: Family Of God

Released: 1996

Recorded: Adam Peters' apartment; Smylonylon, New York

Current availability: not on streaming services (second-hand copies available)

Korinna Knoll

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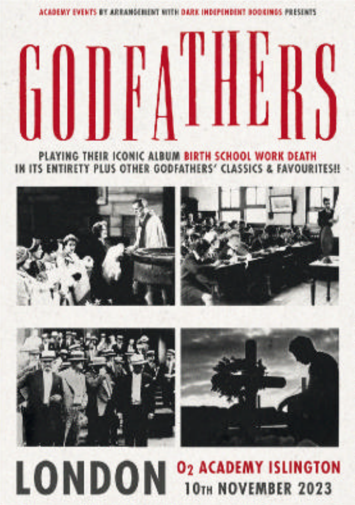

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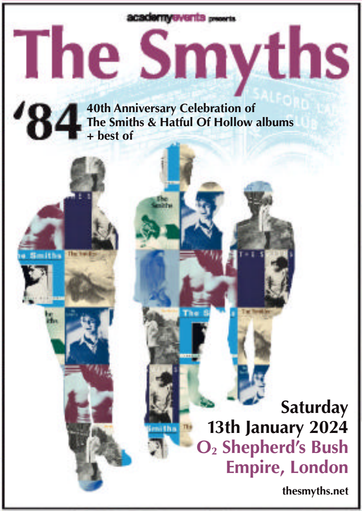

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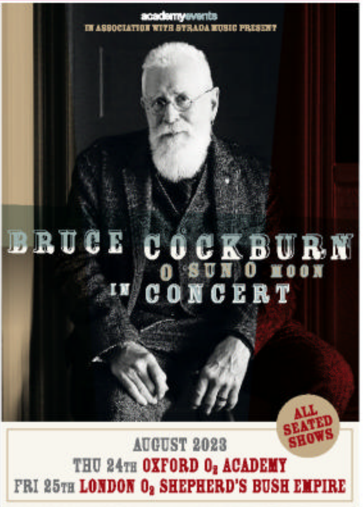

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BEE GEES

Jive mentality: Bee Gees (from left) Robin, Barry and Maurice Gibb with a selection of their multimillion-selling LPs, 1979.

Bee Gees

The awkward genius of three brothers from the Isle Of Man. By **Andrew Male.**

WRITING IN the introduction to his recent Bee Gees biography, Children Of The World, Bob Stanley makes what might be the defining point about this deeply strange group. "They never fitted in, never really made sense."

A trio of curious, insecure Isle Of Man-born brothers, Barry, Maurice and Robin Gibb were undeniably songwriting geniuses, part of a multimillion-selling pop group with over 20 Top 20 US hits and nine Number 1 singles between 1967 and Maurice's death in 2003. Yet they were also regarded as figures of ridicule throughout their 35-year career. Even at the peak of their success the Bee Gees were mocked for numerous reasons (Barry's falsetto, their toothy smiles, the medallion-man fashions, their defensive, bruised stance in interviews) and never allowed the cachet of cool eventually accorded to their peers: The Beatles, ABBA, Fleetwood Mac. Considered dispassionately, that's partly down to their mercurial, hubristic natures, both as artists and people, but also their creative approach, which was as much dependent on a genius for assimilation as innovation.

> **"Barry, Maurice and Robin Gibb were undeniably songwriting geniuses."**

Getty

You might define their '60s sound as orchestral, existential and baroque, their '70s pomp as vertiginous, harmony-drenched R&B, but neither fully captures the group's magpie eclecticism or stylistic incoherence. They also had a habit of bestowing their best work to other bands or artists (the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack, Dionne Warwick's *Heartbreaker*, Barbra Streisand's *Guilty*) sticking it on B-sides or shit-canning it all together. A deep-archive Bee Gees compilation is needed along the lines of The Beatles' *Anthology* series or The Monkees' *Missing Links*.

Then there is the question of their voices. Robin Gibb's vulnerable yet pitch-perfect head-voice delivery can often sound viscerally disquieting, while Barry's anguished euphoric falsetto is nails-on-a-blackboard to some. They don't fit. Therefore, the attempt with this How To Buy has been to embrace the eclecticism, eccentricities and idiosyncrasies. So, while there is definitely a version of a Bee Gees How To Buy that includes *Saturday Night Fever*, *Guilty* and *Heartbreaker*, Andy Gibb's *Shadow Dancing*, a brace of Robin Gibb choices, and a multi-disc Best Of, this will concentrate solely on the group's studio LPs. A world of strange wonder awaits.

CAST YOUR VOTES...

This month you chose your Top 10 Bee Gees LPs. Next month we want your MOJO CDs Top 10, to mark our 30th anniversary. Send selections via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or e-mail to mojo@bauermedia.co.uk with the subject 'How To Buy MOJO CDs' and we'll print the best comments.

BEE GEES
This Is Where I Came In

10 Bee Gees
This Is Where I Came In

POLYDOR, 2001

You say: "The hopping around between Beatles-y stuff, dark AOR and blue-eyed soul really works." Caïna @cainalikehyena, via Twitter

With a newfound confidence, Maurice clean and committed and an eerie sense this might well be their swan song, *This…* is 52 kaleidoscopic minutes of the Bee Gees at their most eclectic, optimistic and playful. Referencing every period of their career, from post-Beatles psych to melancholy '70s soul and proto-ABBA Europop, it sounds like a lost Gerry Rafferty powerpop LP or a science-lab experiment in boy-band soul. All told, it brims with optimism and only the Cliff Richard chintz of Wedding Day lets it down. Sadly, their instincts were right; this was their farewell. Maurice died of a sudden heart attack at Mount Sinai Medical Center in Florida, on January 12, 2003.

BEE GEES
ODESSA

4 Bee Gees
Odessa

POLYDOR, 1969

You say: "Lyrics a thousand university theses could be written about, orchestral arrangements to rival Scott Walker." Ian Purser @ip3329, via Twitter

Housed in a gold-embossed, red-flocked gatefold sleeve, this double concept LP, about the sinking of a ship in the Baltic Sea in the 1890s, finds the Bee Gees at their most ambitious, hubristic and majestic. With the brothers bickering, only Robin took the project seriously, penning a trio of arcane themed epics held firm by Bill Shepherd's rich arrangements. Ultimately, the LP works because it goes off-message, allowing for such additions as Robin's majestic ballad Lamplight, and two Barry nuggets of Band-style Americana, Marley Purt Drive and Give Your Best. But when Barry's lachrymose chanson First Of May was chosen as a single over Lamplight, Robin left the group. For a year.

BEE GEES
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

9
Bee Gees
To Whom It May Concern

POLYDOR, 1972

You say: "Slowly morphing into their soul period, how can you not be moved?" @stimcitytigers, via Twitter

Their last LP for producer Robert Stigwood and so named, according to Maurice, "because we didn't know who the hell was going to buy it", *To Whom It May Concern* feels like a farewell statement from a band who had no idea where they were going. Beyond the uninspiring K-Tel comp cover lies beautifully defeated autobiographical ballads, knowing slices of Robin introspection, glam Lennon rockers and the macabre Paper Mache, Cabbages And Kings, which flits between the Bee Gees' psych past and their soul future. However, the true stand-out is spectral Moog hex Sweet Song Of Summer where the boys speak in tongues and harmonise about "evil darkness" over rumbling tom-toms and heavy modular drones.

LIVING EYES
BEE GEES

8
Bee Gees
Living Eyes

RSO, 1981

You say: "Really love the *Living Eyes* album. The track Paradise is a classic." Hesham Sabry @Heshams, via Twitter

With Maurice Gibb fully involved in the recording process, sober again after years of boozing had reduced him to a session player, *Living Eyes* is the Bee Gees at their collaborative best. The outdated disco falsetto has wisely been dialled back and the result is a surprisingly rich and subtle work of early-'80s AOR. There isn't a bad track here but highlights include Maurice's easeful Wildflower, which sounds like a lost gem from The Beach Boys' *Surf's Up*, the interweaving harmonies of Paradise, majestic orchestral *Odessa* throwback Be Who You Are and the magnificent Cryin' Every Day which predates the electro-pop sound of Robin's hugely underrated (if dubiously-titled) 1983 solo LP, *How Old Are You?*.

BEE GEES
TRAFALGAR

7
Bee Gees
Trafalgar

POLYDOR, 1971

You say: "They'd done 'dark' before, but this one is wall-to-wall gut-wrenching misery. Love it." @handofglory, via Twitter

Magnificently bleak and despairing, *Trafalgar* is, like Frank Sinatra's *All Alone* or F.J. McMahon's *Spirit Of The Golden Juice*, one of those brilliant LPs that's effectively one song; a heavyweight collection of sumptuous (mostly) slow-core ballads suffused with rich harmonies, swirling strings and desolate characters walking through graveyards. Admittedly, that sounds as far away from *Saturday Night Fever* as anyone could imagine but once you attune to *Trafalgar*'s orchestral blues-heft the effect is almost exhilarating. Incredibly, the gloriously miserable Don't Wanna Live Inside Myself (a less optimistic rendering of Neil Young's Helpless) was released as a US single and lurched to the Number 53 slot.

BeeGees
MR.NATURAL

6
Bee Gees
Mr Natural

RSO, 1974

You say: "Half a step beyond the sensitive balladeers of 1970-73, Arif Mardin gets them to bring the funk…" Sir Novelty Fashion @SirNvltyFashion, via Twitter

The biggest flop of their career thus far, *Mr Natural* is also the Rosetta Stone for anyone seeking to understand the Bee Gees' transformation from '60s orchestral balladry to '70s falsetto funk. Exquisitely produced by Arif Mardin, who perhaps understood the boys' high-register vocals required a cushioned production of smooth Philly strings, *Mr Natural* is gorgeously upbeat blue-eyed soul, albeit defiantly weird. Voices moves between eerie Robin seance, slow Isleys groove and apocalyptic choral euphoria, while the beautiful, cinematic Dogs appears to be about a homeless father living in a tree with a pack of mutts during the winter of 1973.

5
Bee Gees
Spirits Having Flown

RSO, 1979

You say: "Laser-guided melodies. Masters of the universe. What could go wrong?" Paul Thornton @PDThornton_esq, via Twitter

How do you follow *Saturday Night Fever*? With a Number 1 LP in the UK and USA, of course. *Spirits Having Flown* was such a huge hit and its sound so ubiquitous that it's easy to overlook what a brilliantly bizarre LP it is. But listen beyond Barry's elevated falsetto and that luxuriant Miami soul sound and you hear a sequestered, obsessive record, born of long nights and windowless studios and containing some of the group's most perfect compositions, including the magnificently paranoid Search, Find, and a soaring title track which reframes the introspection and disquiet of their '60s sound as a meticulous sci-fi art project.

BEE GEES
HORIZONTAL

3
Bee Gees
Horizontal

POLYDOR, 1968

You say: "Great combination of heavy tracks and sad whimsy. The B-sides (Sinking Ships, Ring My Bell) on the deluxe version are stunning." Mr Benn @_SpecialBL, via Twitter

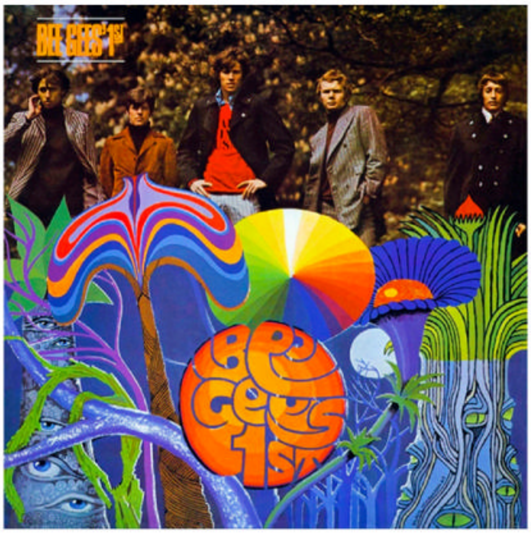
Recorded between July and November 1967, *Horizontal* is the sound of a group simultaneously witness to and removed from the Summer of Love, assimilating Hendrix, The Kinks and *Sgt. Pepper* and transforming them into a sepia, weather-beaten psychedelia. Centred around the soaring Gene Pitney melancholy of Massachusetts, it's an utterly assured album that moves effortlessly between perfect pastiche (abstract Beatles commentary Lemons Never Forget is effectively a blueprint for Oasis's entire career) and glorious baroque balladry (Daytime Girl, Really And Sincerely, And The Sun Will Shine), steeped in anxious, swirling hopelessness.

2
Bee Gees
Main Course

RSO, 1975

You say: "Where their writing and studio skills combined to create pop perfection." Marc P Jones @TravellersWrit1, via Twitter

The brothers had relocated to Miami from LA and the change is one of power. In addition to the warmth producer Arif Mardin had brought to previous LP *Mr Natural* is a comforting weight and bottom-end groove, thanks to Maurice's electric bass and Blue Weaver's ARP synth. An unassailably perfect side one (Nights On Broadway; Jive Talkin'; Wind Of Change; Songbird; Fanny) sits somewhere between the folky blue-eyed soul of Hall & Oates and Buckingham/Nicks-era Fleetwood Mac, but elevated by the brothers' unique interweaving harmonies. If side two were half as good, this would be their greatest album ever, but without the groove and the hooks it merely sounds very good.



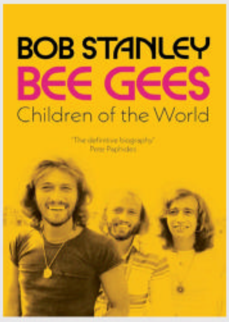
1
Bee Gees
Bee Gees' 1st

POLYDOR, 1967

You say: "Changed the lives of everyone I played it for, [especially] Every Christian Lion Hearted Man Will Show You." Laura Lorson @prairielaura, via Twitter

From its Klaus Voormann-designed cover to the resolutely false labelling (the boys had already released two LPs in Australia) and wealth of Beatles-esque melodies, *1st* initially appears as the work of '60s pop mountebanks. However, beyond the glorious nasal Lennonisms of In My Own Time ("Sitting selling hot cross buns"), *1st* is so defiantly rich, strange, and unique that it exists far beyond mere pastiche. For who else but the Gibbs could have created the heavy-psych epic that is Every Christian Lion Hearted Man Will Show You and the sweeping baroque despondency of I Can't See Nobody? Or even write two grandiose '60s pop hits (To Love Somebody; New York Mining Disaster 1941) deeply saturated with a florid existential sadness? Drenched in strings and mellotron, *1st* might be the most hauntingly melancholic UK psychedelia ever recorded.

NOW DIG THIS



We'll assume you already own *Saturday Night Fever*. Most definitive Best Of? The 4-CD *Tales From The Brothers Gibb* or *Mythology*. No single-disc can do it. Also check out such Bee Gees/Barry Gibb production/writing projects on Barbra Streisand's *Guilty* and Dionne Warwick's *Heartbreaker*, while Robin Gibb's 1969-70 'solo' retrospective *Saved By The Bell* is worth grabbing: "The sound of a teenage millionaire writing death letters from a lost suburbia," said this writer on release. Book-wise, we'll assume you already own Bob Stanley's Children Of The World, but might need Andrew Môn Hughes and co's duology The Bee Gees In The 1960s & 1970s. Documentary-wise, Frank Marshall's How Can You Mend A Broken Heart (2020) is good but doesn't go far enough.

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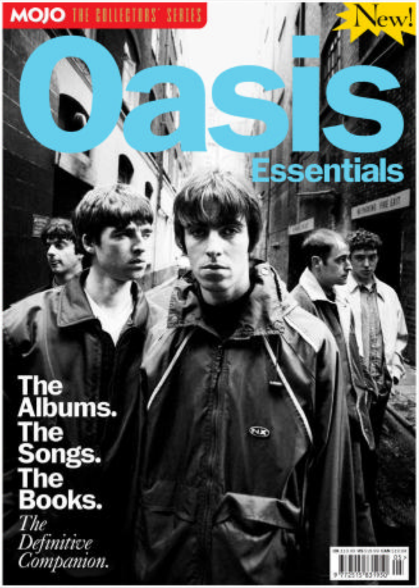
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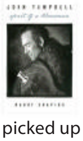
John Campbell: Spirit Of A Bluesman

★★★★

Harry Shapiro

CROSSROADS PRESS. £18.95

Biography of late guitarist hailed by Keef and Clapton.



In 1968, aged 16, Louisiana's John Campbell was involved in a near fatal road accident. Convalescing, he picked up the guitar, and at 18 hit the road playing beautifully wrought acoustic blues to anyone who'd listen. By his twenties, Albert Collins, Muddy Waters and (allegedly) Billy Gibbons had all asked him to join their respective bands, but instead he relocated to New York and made three solo records that got him dubbed "the next Stevie Ray Vaughan." Dead from a heart-attack in 1993 at just 41, he's since faded from view. Shapiro, author of biographies on Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton and Gary Moore, pieces together his story through detailed interviews with family, friends and musician fans – "A fuckin' monster," Keith Richards says – and discovers a complex, charismatic figure chased by demons and finding a safe space on-stage.

Lois Wilson

Party Lines: Dance Music And The Making of Modern Britain

★★★

Ed Gillett

PICADOR. £20

Heavyweight rave history lands some good punches but is a little slow on its feet.

Best known for his work on Everybody In The Place, artist Jeremy Deller's well-loved TV rave encounter group for schools, Ed Gillett's first book is a hefty historical survey not so much of dance music itself as the socio-economic context in which it has been experienced; more a work of political science than beat science. It is ambitious in scope – a half-century span from blues dances to illegal Covid lockdown raves – but not always in execution, with some trenchant analysis (for example of the British state's punitive approach to black creativity, or techno's mutation from underground upsurge to safe harbour for finance capital) offset by too much deferential quotation from a canon of approved sources. My favourite passages, the ones where Gillett seems to have the most skin in the game, are the dissections of Channel U skits and YouTube staples like The Hitman & Her's disastrous 1989 trip to the Haçienda.

Ben Thompson

What Have We Got?: The Turbulent Story Of Oi!

★★★

Simon Spence

OMNIBUS. £20

Pride and prejudice: survey of notorious punk sub-genre

Horrified as Sham 69's gigs were regularly ruined by sieg-heiling thugs, bassist Dave Parsons remembers asking himself: "How the hell do you get rid of these people?" It was a problem that Oi! – the early-'80s, proletarian punk movement that Sham 69 inspired – never quite resolved. What Have We Got? shows how scene big-hitters Cockney Rejects, Angelic Upstarts and the 4-Skins came to be tarnished by perceived association with Nazi acts like Skrewdriver. Striving to separate the skinheads from the boneheads, Spence meets the wary old guard but also unpicks the strands of modern Oi!, depicting a more nuanced form of street-level art than its historic links to football hooliganism and the British Movement might suggest (though he is oddly incurious about its homoerotic subtext). If only those kids had been united, etc.

Jim Wirth

Echoes: A Memoir Continued…

★★★★

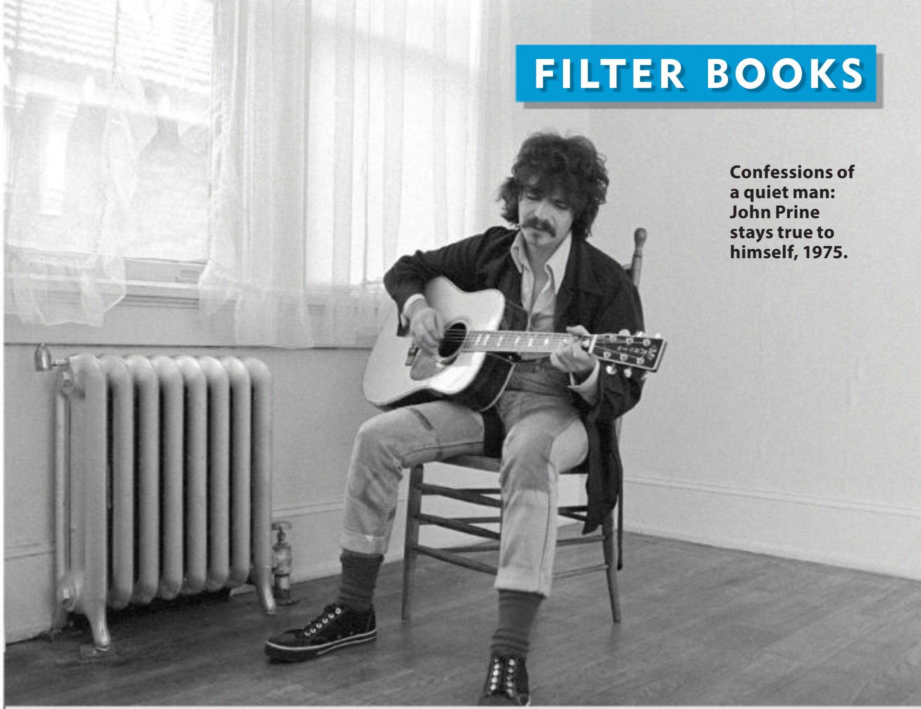
Will Sergeant

CONSTABLE. £22

The ongoing adventures of a Bunnyman, 1979-1982.

Will Sergeant's hugely entertaining 2021 memoir Bunnyman was the Liverpool guitarist's origin story, ending just as Echo & The Bunnymen got together. Even without the thrills'n'spills of the traditional rock narrative, it revealed a very engaging, funny writer: a top-drawer raconteur whose freewheeling style leapt off the page. Echoes starts on September 15, 1979, and zips away, as if Sergeant hasn't taken a breath. Brilliant tale follows brilliant tale, often wrung for comedy drama (the thunderous noise at Pete De Freitas's first rehearsal in a domestic basement, and the shock of their pal Yorkie's mum Gladys upstairs – "Can't you play those fucking drums any louder?" – is sitcom-worthy). The makings of *Crocodiles* and *Heaven Up Here* are vividly related, and it ends in an encounter with Paul McCartney, the young Courtney Love turning up in Liverpool and *Porcupine* yet to be recorded. We await the next gripping instalment.

Tom Doyle



Confessions of a quiet man: John Prine stays true to himself, 1975.

Getty

The postman always rings twice

The poignant and funny storyteller tells his own story – again and again. By **Grayson Haver Currin.**

Prine On Prine: Interviews And Encounters With John Prine

★★★

Edited by Holly Gleason

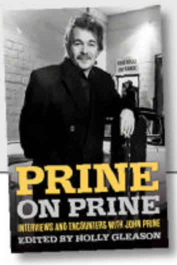
CHICAGO REVIEW PRESS. £14

HOLLY GLEASON begins her anthology of conversations with John Prine with the sort of ironic honesty that the wry truth-teller might have admired: "John Prine hated interviews. Hated them. Hated talking about himself, hated taking apart the songs." And then, of course, the next 300-plus pages of the latest edition in the long-running Interviews And Encounters series collate three-dozen profiles, interviews, and essays about Prine, fully traversing his 50-year career: from his discovery by young Chicago film critic Roger Ebert in 1970 to his gracious exchange with Bob Mehr for MOJO in 2020. For someone who didn't want to speak about himself to professional strangers, Prine sure did a lot of it.

But as Prine On Prine bears out, the last laugh was always Prine's. This compendium reads like the punchline of Prine's long game, where he'd only dole out so much of his mind at a time to prying reporters. Indeed, most of these pieces hinge on the same uncanny biographical points – the singing mailman who gets discovered by Kristofferson and extolled by Dylan, lands a major-label deal that produced one of the wisest debut albums ever cut by an American songwriter, and then launches a homegrown label empire. Also, he was a cancer survivor who knew how to laugh about that, too. Prine was always ready to retread these tales, and they appear here often enough to feel at best redundant and at worst maddeningly mythical.

What about the way his two divorces shaped his writing, or becoming a father rather late in life? And as a working-class kid with roots in a Kentucky denuded by avarice, and as someone who sang songs from the perspective of the often-overlooked, how did he stomach escalating American inequality, especially as an iconoclastic Nashville outsider? Such points – small but profound, or ambitious but germane – are largely eschewed for avuncular exchanges with Prine, both parties content to stick within familiar frames. Despite Gleason's personal rapport with him, even her pieces here, from a 1986 promotional bio for *German Afternoons* to a profile 25 years later anchored to the discovery of some early recordings, wade the same waters.

Gleason's meticulous research, however, does turn up unexpected delights, especially where Prine sidesteps the familiar. A brief interview about his beloved cars for Hot Rod is intimate and disarming, full of bits of folk wisdom. ("The reason cars looked so good in other years was because the music was good.") The same holds for his recipes for pork roast and his mother's for leftover hash, as told to music writer and cookbook author Ronni Lundy. "I can't have my total concentration on my writing," he admits. "Cooking's one of the best times for me to write." Such curious little revelations helped make Prine the songwriter so compelling, and they make this set occasionally compelling, too, even if the tome lacks his love of narrative economy.



Mother courage: Sinéad O'Connor in London, 1991; (opposite page, from top) on-stage in Utrecht, March 16, 1988, and in Vancouver, February 1, 2020.

Out Of The Depths

Once-in-a-generation voice of pain and catharsis **Sinéad O'Connor** left us on July 26.

IN 2014, SINÉAD O'CONNOR told MOJO, "I guess I'm someone who from the beginning of being a songwriter, I was singing because I had things to get off my chest." It was something of an understatement. Arguably no singer since John Lennon – one of her chief influences, whom she admired for being "angry… sad, too… and brave" – seemed to be able to alchemise their trauma and pain so boldly into such cathartic and frequently stunning music.

Remarkably, there were only six months between the death of O'Connor's mother – at whose hands she'd suffered years of physical abuse – in a car crash in February 1985 and the 18-year-old singer (born Sinéad Marie Bernadette O'Connor in Dublin on December 8, 1966) signing her first deal, with Ensign Records, in August 1985. Her grief was to be beautifully and movingly translated into the defiant, howling Troy, the standout track from her 1987 debut album, *The Lion And The Cobra*.

But if O'Connor seemed supremely confident as a performer from the outset, often it was a persona that she was forcing herself to assume. "I was a very over-anxious kind of person," she told this writer in 2005. "Anyone who'd known me would tell you the opposite. But I guess there's a few different people in here though, to be honest. The Sinéad O'Connor that's on-stage singing is a very different character. It's like you're channelling something. I've got this thing coming through me that's this very strong character, but I'm not that necessarily."

Nonetheless, music grounded O'Connor, from her teenage years when she first picked up a guitar (a gift from a nurturing nun) and taught herself Bob Dylan's To Ramona, going on to regularly win Dublin talent contests with her rendition of Lloyd Webber/Rice's Don't Cry For Me Argentina ("Everyone fucking loves it," she later pointed out. "It wouldn't matter if you farted it out of your arse"). Other disparate, formative influences included Barbra Streisand, David Bowie, Bob Marley and the Sex Pistols.

A stint singing with Dublin band Ton Ton Macoute brought her to the attention of Ensign, and the release of *The Lion…* followed when she was only 20 – the album a success on both sides of the Atlantic. But it was with its follow-up, 1990's *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got* (Number 1 in both the UK and US), that O'Connor became a huge international star, powered by her heart-rending reading of Prince's Nothing Compares 2 U and its starkly emotional video.

Then, she turned supernova, exploding her stardom with her ripping up of a photograph of Pope John Paul II – notably the one that had been on her mother's bedroom wall – on Saturday Night Live on October 3, 1992, following an a cappella rendering of Marley's War, tweaked to repeatedly include the words "child abuse" and ending with her stating, "Fight the real enemy". A fortnight later, she was booed at a Bob Dylan tribute concert at Madison Square Garden, as protests were organised in New York involving the destruction of her albums (one of which – brilliantly – she attended in disguise, being interviewed by a TV news crew).

The controversy derailed her career in America, although O'Connor didn't view it that way. "I feel that having a Number 1 record derailed my career and my tearing the photo put me back on the right track," she reasoned in her 2021 memoir, Rememberings. "I wasn't born to be a pop star. You have to be a good girl for that. Not be too troubled."

Instead, a resolute O'Connor delivered her most directly personal album, in the shape of 1994's *Universal Mother*, tackling her mother's abuse in Fire On Babylon and re-working Kurt Cobain's All Apologies in hushed tones, making it entirely her own. "For me that album was the first attempt to try to expose what was really underneath a lot of the anger of the other records," she told MOJO.

From here, O'Connor developed a pattern of dropping in and out of her musical career, announcing her retirement from the record industry in 2003, before returning two years later to devote herself to making what she termed "spiritual/religious" albums. The Jamaica-recorded reggae covers set, *Throw Down Your Arms*, arrived in 2005, followed by the *Theology* double two years later.

Sinéad O'Connor
I do not want what I haven't got

THE LEGACY

The Album: *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got* (ENSIGN, 1990)
The Sound: O'Connor's moving rendition of Prince's Nothing Compares 2 U was the entry point to an album that was hugely successful (seven million sales worldwide), yet bravely unorthodox, veering from an Irish folk song sung over James Brown's Funky Drummer breakbeat (I Am Stretched On Your Grave) to acoustic laments Black Boys On Mopeds and Last Day Of Our Acquaintance.

Her most recent album, 2014's *I'm Not Bossy, I'm The Boss*, involved another volte-face, comprising, as she put it, "just three-minute pop songs and love songs".

Her life, however, continued to be turbulent, part-explained by her bipolar diagnosis in the early 2000s. Through the years, she continually sought meaning and solace in religion – being ordained as a female priest in Lourdes in 1999; later mixing her Catholicism with Rastafarianism, before converting to Islam in 2018 and changing her name to Shuhada Sadaqat. Three years earlier, a hysterectomy prompted what she called a "total breakdown". Then, in January 2022, O'Connor's 17-year-old son, Shane, committed suicide, leading to a period of voluntary hospitalisation for the singer.

In recent years, O'Connor had been working on a new album with producer David Holmes, provisionally titled *No Veteran Dies Alone* (inspired by a programme for ageing ex-military personnel she'd involved herself with in America). Ultimately, it seems, music helped to ground Sinéad O'Connor until the end. Or, in her mind, allowed her to soar.

"I like it when I manage to transport my thinking brain to somewhere else, just let fly," she told MOJO when explaining her inherent need to perform.

"It *is* my soul in lots of ways. It's the time that I most feel like me."

Tom Doyle

> "I wasn't born to be a pop star."
> **SINÉAD O'CONNOR**

AJ Barratt, Getty (2)

Love unlimited: singer, actress, French icon – Jane Birkin in 1969.

Shutterstock

Alias Melody Nelson

Jane Birkin, singer, screen star and Gainsbourg's muse, left us on July 16.

IN 1969, Jane Birkin's debut single was a UK Number 1 and an international scandal. Je T'Aime… Moi Non Plus was a duet with revered French singer-songwriter and Birkin's romantic partner Serge Gainsbourg, and sounded like the two were making love. Banned by the BBC and condemned by the Vatican, it reached a serendipitous Number 69 in the US charts and sold over six million copies. Birkin said the British press never stopped asking her about her "dirty record". "A bit demoralising," she told this writer, "but actually, if you're going to be well-known for something until you die, why not that?"

Birkin was born in London on December 14, 1946. Her mother was actress, and muse to Noël Coward, Judy Campbell. In her teens, Birkin tentatively followed in her mother's footsteps on-stage, and in 1965 she was cast by composer and Bond film soundtracker John Barry in his musical The Passion Flower Hotel; they married the same year. In 1966 she appeared in Blow-Up, Michelangelo Antonioni's Swinging London thriller, becoming the first full-frontal nude in an English-language film. By her own description she was shy and modest, but was still minded to seize the moments life presented. When living with Barry became impossible, in 1968 she took their baby and moved to France to audition for a movie, Slogan. Despite not speaking French, she got it. The leading man was Gainsbourg, who encouraged her to sing and became her musical partner and lover.

> "If you're going to be well-known for something until you die, why not that?"
>
> JANE BIRKIN ON JE T'AIME… MOI NON PLUS

Living full-time in France, Birkin became a popular film actor, and spent the 1970s and '80s alternating between movies and recording Gainsbourg's songs. Their musical collaboration endured even after their relationship ended in 1980. Tired of his alcoholic alter-ego 'Gainsbarre', Birkin left him for French film director Jacques Doillon, though Gainsbourg continued to write songs for her for the rest of his life.

After his death in 1991, she continued to champion the man and his music, keeping his songbook alive on records and on-stage, with a variety of often sublime arrangements, from world music (*Arabesque*, 2002) to a symphony orchestra (*Birkin/Gainsbourg: Le Symphonique*, 2017). On *Rendez-Vous* (2004) she duetted with artists including Bryan Ferry (on In Every Dream Home A Heartache), Caetano Veloso and Françoise Hardy. She also recorded her own songs, to great effect on *Enfants D'Hiver* (2008) and even more so on her final album, *Oh! Pardon, Tu Dormais…* (2020).

In spite of her years in France, Birkin always spoke with an English accent – more specifically like a chic young London girl on the King's Road in the '60s – and retained her native pragmatism and self-deprecating humour. Following her death at home in Paris, the city's Mayor Anne Hidalgo called her, "the most Parisian of the English… we will never forget her, for her songs, her laughs and her incomparable accent." President Macron, meanwhile, saluted her as a "French icon".

Sylvie Simmons

THE LEGACY

The album: *Arabesque* (EMI International, 2002)

The sound: Recorded live at the Olympia Theatre in Paris, this bold take on Gainsbourg's songs proves how much Birkin understood them. With Algerian violinist Djamel Benyelles as musical director, Gainsbourg's songs weave between East and West, sensuality and sadness, rhythm and melancholy. He'd have loved the percussive Couleur Café, the heart-wrenching Élisa, and La Javanaise, sung a cappella like a national anthem.

Rick Froberg

Art-punk magus

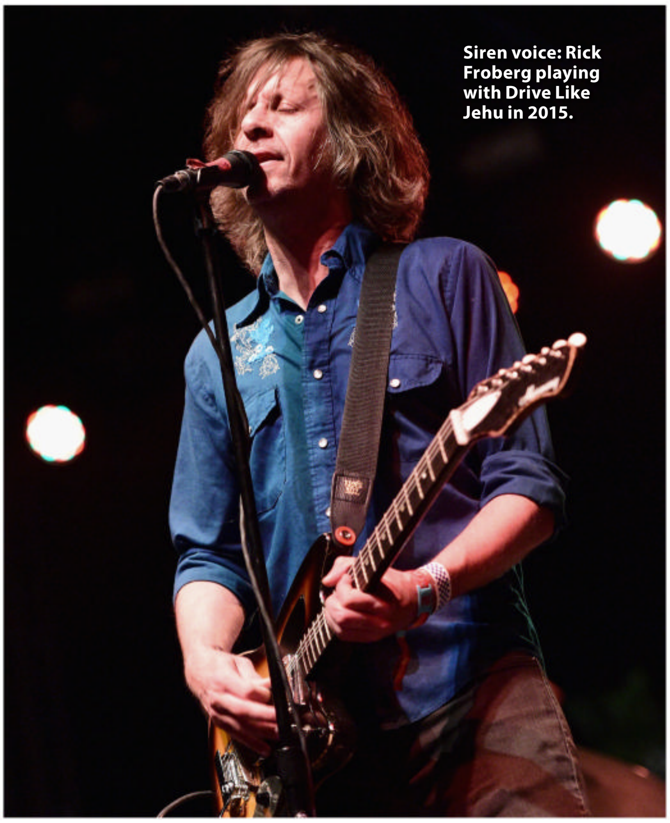
BORN 1968

AS SINGER-GUITARIST in Drive Like Jehu and Hot Snakes, Rick Froberg fronted two of the most viscerally exciting bands to emerge from the US post-hardcore underground. He met his creative partner in both groups, John Reis, in 1986 at a picnic organised by San Diego anarchist newsletter Daily Impulse, and became vocalist in Reis's band Pitchfork, drawing on earlier touchstones Sonic Youth, Mission Of Burma and Fugazi. For the subsequent Drive Like Jehu, Froberg added guitar to his wounded animal screaming, as he and Reis built brooding melodic abstractions around bassist Mike Kennedy and drummer Mark Trombino's indomitable powerage, culminating in 1994's art-punk landmark *Yank Crime*.

Prior to music, the teenage Froberg made art, initially for his fanzine Subculture, then his bands' flyers and record sleeves. After Drive Like Jehu's 1995 split, he moved to New York and became a freelance illustrator and designer, collaborating with famed cartoonist Gary Panter, and contributing to the New York Times. In 2000 his distinctive surrealist mash-up of contrasting modern stylists – his stated influences included Raymond Pettibon, Mary Blair and Goya – again decorated his own music when Reis asked Froberg to join Hot Snakes, releasing three albums of Wire-meets-Black Flag downstroke brutalism before splitting in 2005. Froberg then made three albums for Sub Pop with his new band Obits, while reuniting with Hot Snakes in 2011, then Drive Like Jehu in 2014, for periodic gigging. In 2018, Sub Pop released *Jericho Sirens*, the first Hot Snakes album in 14 years, with Froberg's alienated soapbox orator – "I feel peremptory forces standing in my way!" – never more desperate or profound.

An intense performer but mild and self-effacing off-duty, Froberg died on June 30 from an undiagnosed heart condition, just two weeks after announcing that a new Hot Snakes album was "very near done". Paying tribute, John Reis said: "His art made life better. I love you Rick. I will miss you for the rest of my life."

Keith Cameron



Siren voice: Rick Froberg playing with Drive Like Jehu in 2015.

The Gleaner, Getty (2), Dick Cooper

Vicki Anderson

J.B.'s Soul Sister

BORN 1939

BORN MYRA Barnes in Houston, Texas, Vicki Anderson sang in her local Mount View Church from the age of five. In 1965 she joined the James Brown Revue, bringing gospel fervour to his repertoire, most notably with the 1970 trifecta of empowerment anthems: The Message From The Soul Sisters; No More Heartaches, No More Pain; and Super Good (Answer To Super Bad). It was these kind of tough performances that led Brown to declare her the greatest singer to feature in his revue, from which she departed in 1972. Anderson also recorded several duets with Brown's bandleader Bobby Byrd, whom she was married to until his death in 2007. In the '80s, rediscovered by the rare groove and hip-hop communities, she returned with sold-out shows worldwide, and released a poignant reading of Home Is Where The Hatred Is with Italian jazz band Bossa Nostra in 1996. More recently, she delivered workshops for women working in media, arts and entertainment.

Lois Wilson

> "James Brown declared Vicki Anderson the best singer in his revue."

Cry freedom: Lord Creator, the voice of Independent Jamaica.

Lord Creator

Calypso king of Kingston Town

BORN 1935

IN 1962, smooth-voiced rising star of Trinidadian calypso Kenrick Patrick, known as Lord Creator, was playing Kingston's Havana club when producer Vincent 'Randy' Chin asked him to write an anthem for Jamaica's imminent freedom from British rule. The ensuing calypso-flavoured Independent Jamaica became the soundtrack to that year's festivities – also, the very first 45 on Chris Blackwell's Island label. Patrick duly relocated to Jamaica and recorded prolifically with Chin through the ska/rocksteady era. With hits including Don't Stay Out Late, he also recorded for both Prince Buster and Clement Dodd's Studio One. As the honey-throated crooner's career faded in the rootsy '70s, he returned to Trinidad and suffered a stroke, but his fortunes improved in 1989 when UB40 covered his poignant 1970 hit Kingston Town, striking gold globally. With the royalties, Patrick built a substantial pile in Montego Bay and lived out a luxurious retirement.

Andrew Perry

Jerry Masters

Muscle Shoals mix master

BORN 1939

"PEOPLE IN Muscle Shoals used to say I could hear a rat peeing on cotton in Kansas City," Jerry Masters quipped earlier this year, referring to his reputation as a bat-eared studio engineer. Originally from Little Rock, Arkansas, he started out playing bass with country star Charlie Rich before joining The Hombres, a Memphis garage band that hit the US charts in 1967 with Let It Out (Let It All Hang Out). After the group folded, he became a sound engineer at Rick Hall's Fame studio in the early '70s before moving on to Muscle Shoals Sound Studios, where he worked with artists that ranged from The Staple Singers and Candi Staton to Paul Simon and Bob Seger: legendary Sun Records producer Sam Phillips once described him as "the best goddamn mixing engineer in the world." His memoir, Hanging From A Tree By My Knees, was published in 2010.

Charles Waring

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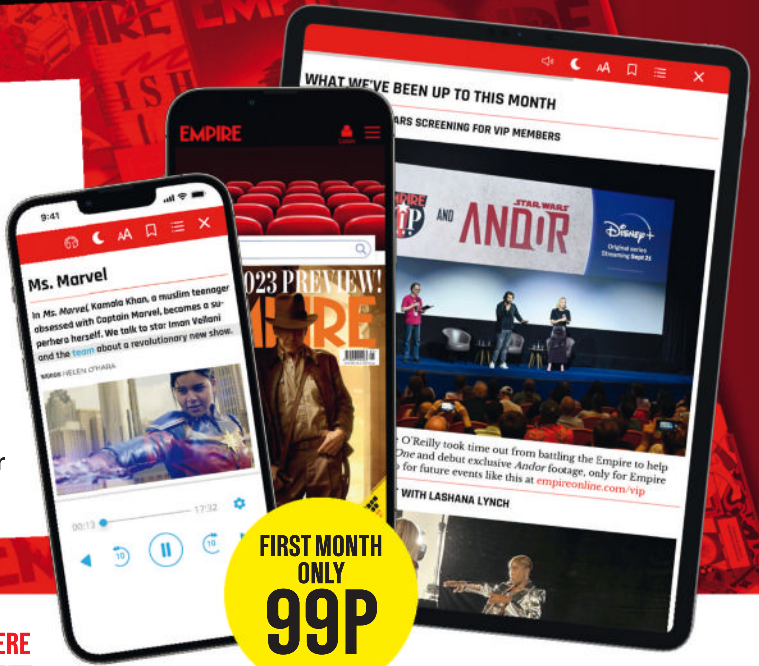

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Tony Bennett: "the best singer in the world," according to Frank Sinatra.

Tony Bennett

Beloved entertainer

BORN 1926

AS HE turned 80, Tony Bennett invited MOJO to lunch in his native New York and recalled the days when his audience were diners like us. "I was a busker," he explained. "I'd wait on tables and the customers would ask for a song and I'd do it and they'd give me a tip. I made $15 a weekend. I loved it!"

Born Anthony Dominick Benedetto, the son of a Calabrian immigrant who died young and a seamstress raising three children in the Depression, Tony Bennett's was the classic American rags-to-riches story with a second act fall from grace and long redemptive third act coming back more beloved than ever.

A singer in the light opera bel canto style exemplified by the Benedetto family favourite Enrico Caruso, Tony Bennett – a stage name suggested by Bob Hope – was further shaped by swing and jazz, particularly Art Tatum's fluid piano and Stan Getz's "honey" saxophone. A decade of hits culminating in 1962's I Left My Heart In San Francisco placed him second only to Frank Sinatra (who declared the younger man "the best singer in the world") in the galaxy of Italian-American stars. Absolute emotional credibility as he lived each moment of the song was Bennett's great talent: when he swung, your fingers popped; when he yearned, you yearned too.

Though the rock revolution relegated Bennett to Vegas, diminishing returns and personal problems, as it ebbed in the '80s, aristocracy like Sting recognised in the dedicated musician and lifelong liberal campaigner – who'd seen the worst of humanity in the US Army liberating Germany in 1945 – not just a monument of living history but an artist in alignment. Though no rock fan, Bennett likewise recognised kindred spirits, and his final decades saw him welcoming myriad modern superstars into his musical world, most fruitfully his fellow Italian-American Lady Gaga.

"When I started singing, there were many discouraging moments," this sweet, gentle man told MOJO over that memorable lunch, "but I said, This day shall pass and I'll start over again tomorrow." And that's exactly what he did.

Mat Snow

THEY ALSO SERVED

BROOKLYN-BORN pianist **PETER NERO** (below, b.1934) came to notice in the US when he appeared on Paul Whiteman's TV show aged 17, playing Rhapsody In Blue. He landed 15 US album chart entries in the '60s and early '70s, the most successful of which was 1971's *Summer Of '42*, whose title song was a hit single. The following year, he wrote an orchestral treatment of the diary of Anne Frank. Able to bridge genres from jazz to classical, and a noted interpreter of Gershwin, from 1979 to 2013 he was director of the Philly POPS Orchestra.

SINGER/SONGWRITER **RAYMOND FROGGATT** (b.1941) played rock'n'roll in Birmingham in the early '60s and released a brace of singles with **The Monopoly**, alongside future ELO man **Louis Clark**, in 1967. The same decade brought him success as a songwriter, penning Red Balloon for the **The Dave Clark Five** in 1968 (his own version went Top 5 in the Netherlands) and Big Ship for **Cliff Richard** in 1969. Leading his own **Raymond Froggatt Band**, he moved into country in the '70s and recorded with **The Jordanaires**. He continued to play for his loyal following into his seventies.

DIRECTOR **PAUL JUSTMAN** (b.1948) directed 2002 documentary Standing In The Shadows Of Motown, which illuminated the contributions of crack sessioneers **The Funk Brothers** to Motown hits. Born in Washington DC, Justman made his name directing promo videos for **Diana Ross**, **The Cars** and others: his most famous was **The J. Geils Band**'s 1981 hit Centerfold, written by Justman's brother Seth, the band's keyboardist. He also made documentaries on **The Doors**, **Cream** and **Deep Purple**.

POP SINGER **VINCE HILL** (b.1934) was born in Coventry and sang with the **Royal Signals Corps** band before joining TV and radio vocal harmonisers **The Raindrops**, alongside **Jackie Lee** of White Horses fame. Going solo in 1961, he scored a huge hit with 1967's Edelweiss, which became his calling card. He later presented TV shows, acted, recorded the pro-Margaret Thatcher 1983 election song It's Maggie For Me, and continued to perform live.

OAKLAND-BORN **MONTE CAZAZZA** (b.1949) co-founded Throbbing Gristle's Industrial Records, where his label mission statement, 'Industrial music for industrial people', became a signifier for an entire genre. Known for his transgressive work in print, performance and sound collage, his music career began with 1979 solo single To Mom On Mother's Day. His subsequent recorded output was compiled by Mute off-shoot The Grey Area in 1992 as *The Worst Of Monte Cazazza*. His collaborations with Psychic TV included 1985's Godstar; Cazazza subsequently focused on film, founding the independent MMFilms.

PRODUCER **CALEB SOUTHERN** (b.1969) was a key part of North Carolina's Chapel Hill scene, founding Kraptone Studios in the early '90s and producing **Archers Of Loaf**'s 1993 debut *Icky Mettle* and **Ben Folds Five**'s first three albums (he was dubbed the fourth member of the group). In 1998 he and Folds recorded an experimental album as Fear Of Pop which included **William Shatner** among its guest vocalists. Southern later became an award-winning academic and computer science lecturer at the Georgia Institute Of Technology in Atlanta.

WOLVERHAMPTON-BORN session bass supremo **MO FOSTER** (below, b.1944) studied science and maths before beginning his career in 1968. He played, live and in the studio, with a huge range of artists including **Jeff Beck**, **Cliff Richard**, **Gary Moore**, **Sheena Easton**, **Scott Walker**, **Cerrone**, **Van Morrison**, **Gerry Rafferty**, **Phil Collins**, **Kevin Ayers**, **Gil Evans**, **Peter Green**, **Leo Sayer**, **Roger Glover** and **Mort Shuman**, among many others. An adept fretless stylist, he also played in Affinity, Fancy and The Secret Policeman's Other Ball band, and released several solo recordings.

BBC RADIO PRODUCER **PETER PILBEAM** (b.1929) booked **The Beatles** for their first ever radio performance on Teenager's Turn, recorded at Manchester's Playhouse Theatre on March 7, 1962. Having recently returned from playing in Hamburg, the band performed four songs: Like Dreamers Do, Till There Was You, Memphis, Tennessee and Hello Little Girl. Pilbeam was unconvinced by Paul McCartney's singing, describing him as the weak link in the band. He did, however, quickly become a champion of the group and advised publisher Dick James to sign them up.

CHICAGO DJ **DEEON** (below, b.1966) was hailed as one of the progenitors of raw and gritty dance sub-genre, ghetto house. Initially selling mixtapes from a car park, he began recording in the mid-'90s, releasing dozens of singles including Freak Like Me, Let Me Bang and Big Fat Pimp. He was named alongside George Clinton, Dr. Dre and Brian Wilson in **Daft Punk**'s 1997 track Teachers.

SKA/ROCKSTEADY singer **PETER AUSTIN** (b.c.1945) sang alongside **Fitzroy 'Ernest' Wilson** in **The Clarendonians** from 1963. First working with **Leslie Kong** and **Duke Reid**, from 1966 they were produced by **Clement Dodd**, recording Jamaican hits including Rudie Bam Bam, Rudie Gone A Jail and initially uncredited Beatles cover You Won't See Me. Austin left the group in the late '60s and worked at Norman Manley International Airport in Kingston. He rejoined The Clarendonians in the mid-'90s to play the oldies circuit.

TOUR MANAGER **SAM CUTLER** (b.1943) worked as stage manager and MC for acts including **Pink Floyd** and **Alexis Korner**. Having been engaged by **The Rolling Stones**, he introduced them at their free concert in Hyde Park in 1969 and is credited with devising their on-stage intro "ladies and gentlemen, the greatest rock and roll band in the world…" He was invited to become the Stones' tour manager and led them on their next US tour, which included Altamont. While in America, Cutler befriended **Jerry Garcia** and became **The Grateful Dead**'s tour manager and agent, later organising gigs for **The Band**, **The Allman Brothers** and **Mike Bloomfield**.

Jenny Bulley, Chris Catchpole and Ian Harrison

Ken Regan/Camera5, Getty (2)

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ATLANTIC
45 RPM
584141
(YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE) A NATURAL WOMAN
(Goffin/King/Wexler)
ARETHA FRANKLIN
Produced by Jerry Wexler
Engineer: Tom Dowd
POLYDOR RECORDS LIMITED

TIME
THE SOUND OF SOUL
SINGER
ARETHA
FRANKLIN

Natural wonder: (clockwise from left) Queen of Soul Aretha Franklin in 1967; …A Natural Woman 45; Time cover star; songwriters Carole King and Gerry Goffin; striking gold: (from left) producer Jerry Wexler, Franklin and husband/manager Ted White.

SEPTEMBER 1967

…Natural Woman Aretha arrives

SEPTEMBER 30 She'd spent six years singing jazz, pop and soul on the Columbia label, but the awesome genius of Detroit-raised, church-schooled Aretha Franklin had failed to break through to the record-buying mainstream. Now, nestled in the bosom of Jerry Wexler's Atlantic Records, and embracing her gospel roots, her career was fully on the ascendant.

The title track of her album *I Never Loved A Man The Way I Love You* had been her first Top 10 entry in April; its parent LP had reached Number 2 in May. Then, in June, Franklin had hit US Number 1 with her cover of Otis Redding's Respect (its writer happily admitted she had made the song her own). Soon after, noted Franklin biographer David Ritz, soul DJ, promoter and personality Pervis 'The Blues Man' Spann crowned her 'Queen of Soul' on-stage at the Regal Theatre in Chicago. Her reign had begun, and her newest chart entry would become one of her most celebrated cover versions, one blending soul, tenderness, liberation and resurrection: (You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman had entered the US charts at Number 70.

The song originated, Wexler recalled, when he was driving by New York's song factory the Brill Building, and saw songwriting spouses Carole King and Gerry Goffin. The duo had soundtracked the early pop era with evergreens including Up On The Roof and The Loco-Motion: now, Wexler told them, he needed a song for Franklin, and it should be one which portrayed a Natural Woman, the partner of the civil rights-associated notion of the Natural Man. Goffin and King demo'd it the following day, giving Wexler a co-writing credit for his contribution.

It was recorded at Chips Moman's American Sound Studio in Memphis with a group including keyboardist Spooner Oldham and bassist Tommy Cogbill. A song of gratitude which acknowledged latent inner strength, it seemed to fit with Franklin's rising star. Her performance fees were skyrocketing, and as Wexler noted, she was on a writing and recording hot streak, with her latest album *Aretha Arrives* heading up the US charts, where it would peak at 5 in October: (You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman, meanwhile, reached Number 8 in November. She was also socially conscious and an active supporter of Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement.

> "I'm an old woman in disguise… you make mistakes."
> **ARETHA FRANKLIN**

In other aspects, the picture was more troubling. In mid-June '68, Time magazine ran an interview with Franklin which claimed that her manager, husband and sometime co-writer Ted White had "roughed her up" at Atlanta's Regency Hyatt House Hotel the previous year, adding, "It was not the first such incident." She was also a heavy smoker, and there were questions about her use of alcohol: in May, she fell off-stage in Columbus, Georgia and broke her arm. Wexler recalled phone conversations where an exhausted Franklin wondered if she could go on: "She never mentioned her husband… she was a woman who suffered silently," he said in David Ritz's 2014 biography Respect: The Life Of Aretha Franklin. He added, "any way you look at it, the work she did during 1967, her first year at Atlantic, will go down in the

Getty (6), Alamy

history books as some of the strongest rhythm and blues that the soul nation has ever produced."

In that 1968 Time interview, which reputedly put Franklin off speaking to the press for ever after, she reflected on her trials: "I might be just 26, but I'm an old woman in disguise – 26 goin' on 65… trying to grow up is hurting, you know. You make mistakes. You try to learn from them, and when you don't it hurts even more. And I've been hurt – hurt bad."

She held on, divorcing White in 1969 and becoming an international star and an icon of soul for over 50 years. Later, in 1978, she reflected on her music helping those in need to her friend David Nathan of Blues & Soul magazine. "If I can touch other people with my music, maybe help them have a better day, that's wonderful," she said. "There are certainly artists who do that for me."

Throughout innumerable hit records, 18 Grammys, multiple Presidential honours and many other awards, (You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman stayed with her. On December 6, 2015, three years before her death aged 76, she performed it at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC in honour of a visibly moved Carole King, and reduced President Barack Obama to tears in the process. "I've been trying to appraise that," Franklin told Vogue. "I've done the Kennedy Center many times… but never that response. I don't want to rate it. I just enjoyed it."

Ian Harrison

Mod's fire and brimstone: The Who blow up The Smother Brothers.

Who and Doors outrage US TV!

SEPTEMBER 15 The Who appear on The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour to play My Generation and recent US hit I Can See For Miles. Keith Moon contrives to load up pyrotechnics in his bass drum to three times the strength they were in rehearsal: after a guitar and amps are smashed, Pete Townshend says the explosion causes him hearing damage and singes his hair (Moonie, meanwhile, gets a piece of cymbal embedded in his arm). Two days later, The Doors appear on The Ed Sullivan Show: Jim Morrison is instructed to change the lyrics of Light My Fire to remove its drug connotations, but refuses. The band are duly banned from the show.

Giving it the Vs: Jimi Hendrix and Noel Redding lark about with Liberal Party leader Jeremy Thorpe.

JIMI ROCKS ESTABLISHMENT

SEPTEMBER 25 Two days after he watched Frank Zappa at the Royal Albert Hall, Jimi Hendrix plays the London Royal Festival Hall at the Guitar-In show, alongside Bert Jansch, Paco Peña, Sebastian Jörgensen and Tim Walker. The FT reports admiringly that Hendrix plays the guitar with his teeth and rolls around on top of it. After the show, Hendrix and group meet Liberal Party leader Jeremy Thorpe and pose for goofy photographs, showing the politician how to play a Flying V guitar. In 1979, Thorpe will gain infamy when he is charged with conspiracy to murder his ex-boyfriend, male model Norman Scott. Thorpe is acquitted on all charges.

ALSO ON!

SOUL LEARNING

9 Stax/Volt release *Stay In School, Don't Be A Drop Out* to radio stations. Within are pro-education messages from Otis Redding (above), Carla Thomas and others. Vice-President Hubert Humphrey's notes aver "THOSE WHO LEARN MORE… EARN MORE! My young friends, that's where the action is!!!"

ZAL'S OUT

9 The Lovin' Spoonful announce that Jerry Yester has replaced guitarist Zal Yanovsky.

HANK TRANSFER

18 A court battle begins in Montgomery, Alabama, over the estate of late country giant Hank Williams.

ALL VAN KIND

30 Van Morrison's Brown Eyed Girl reaches US Number 10. He was recently honoured with a boat party on the Hudson River on the 'SS Blowin' Your Mind': Carmine 'Wassel' DeNoia, an associate of Bang Records' Bert Berns, takes a dislike to attendee Tiny Tim, and throws him overboard.

FLOWER POWER

30 Radio 1 launches at 7am. The first song played, by Tony Blackburn, is Flowers In The Rain by The Move. Other songs in the UK Top 10 this week include Itchycoo Park by the Small Faces, Let's Go To San Francisco by The Flower Pot Men and San Francisco by Scott McKenzie.

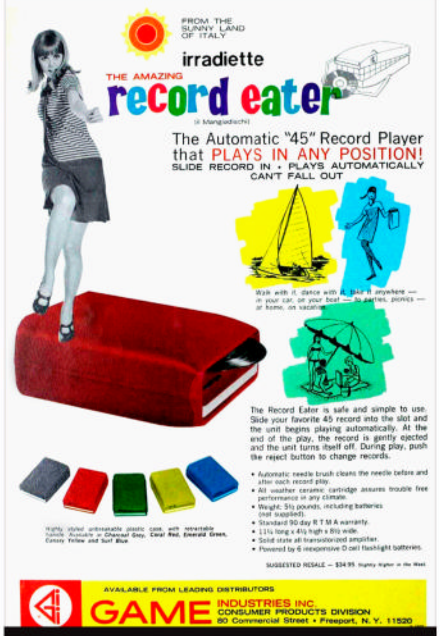
TOP TEN

POLAND SINGLES
SEPTEMBER 30

1 **THE BEATLES** ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE PARLOPHONE
2 **NIEMEN & AKWARELE** DZIWNY JEST TEN ŚWIAT POLSKI NAGRANIA
3 **THE YOUNG RASCALS** GROOVIN' ATLANTIC
4 **TRAFFIC** PAPER SUN ISLAND
5 **DAVE DEE, DOZY, BEAKY, MICK AND TICH** OKAY FONTANA
6 **WOJCIECH GĄSSOWSKI** ŚWIAT BEZ CIEBIE PRONIT
7 **THE TROGGS** NIGHT OF THE LONG GRASS PAGE ONE
8 **PROCOL HARUM** A WHITER SHADE OF PALE DERAM
9 **FOUR TOPS** 7 ROOMS OF GLOOM TAMLA-MOTOWN
10 **SCOTT McKENZIE** SAN FRANCISCO (BE SURE TO WEAR FLOWERS IN YOUR HAIR) CBS

Frisco kid: Scott McKenzie tied up at Number 10.

AD ARCHIVE 1967



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BURNING SPEAR
GARVEY'S GHOST
A DUB ALBUM

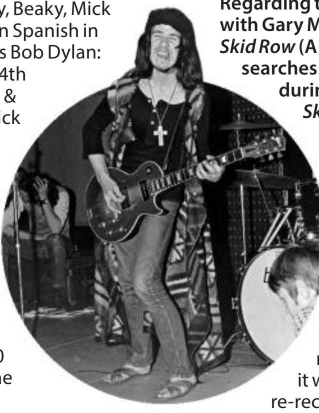
The name of the game: (clockwise from far left) Grace Slick, title-shy singer of White Rabbit; '80s cameo video star Michael Baldwin in XTC's Ball And Chain, Ultravox's Vienna and ABC's The Look Of Love; Burning Spear's *Garvey* dub; Skid Row's Gary Moore.

Which songs don't mention their title?

Let us solve your rock conundrums and join the dots of music obscuria.

Something's been puzzling me for quite a while. Apart from Bohemian Rhapsody and Unchained Melody (and obviously every instrumental), are there any other big-selling records that don't mention the title in the lyrics?
David Tags Taylor, Thurnscoe, South Yorkshire

MOJO says: Excellent question, David. It's an uncommon situation but it's not unheard of. Chart hits whose lyrics don't include the song title include David Bowie's Space Oddity, Dave & Ansel Collins' Double Barrel, Jefferson Airplane's White Rabbit, The Beatles' The Ballad Of John And Yoko, Paranoid by Black Sabbath, The Band's The Weight, Keith West's Excerpt From A Teenage Opera, Nirvana's Smells Like Teen Spirit, The Smiths' How Soon Is Now? and Cardiac Arrest by Madness (we were going to include The Legend Of Xanadu by Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick & Tich, but the title's recited in Spanish in the intro). A repeat offender is Bob Dylan: of US chart entries Positively 4th Street, Rainy Day Women #12 & 35 and Subterranean Homesick Blues, none refer to the title. Other celebrated songs also play it coy, including the Stones' Sympathy For The Devil, the Fabs' A Day In The Life and Tomorrow Never Knows, Marvin Gaye's Inner City Blues, The Message by Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five, Wilson Pickett's Land Of 1000 Dances, Neil Young's After The Gold Rush, Pink Floyd's Brain Damage, Led Zeppelin's Black Dog and The Clash's Train In Vain, though in the US its refrain "stand by me" was appended to the title. Further candidates, anyone?



Getty (2)

WHO IS MYSTERY VIDEO MAN?

The same middle-aged bearded man appears in '80s pop videos of The Look Of Love by ABC, Haircut 100's Love Plus One and Ultravox's Vienna. Who is he?
Graham McCoy, via e-mail

MOJO says: He was also in Simple Minds' Love Song, XTC's Ball And Chain and Bonnie Tyler's Total Eclipse Of The Heart, plus other clips for Elton John, Billy Joel and more. Thanks to top detective work by journalist/filmmaker Christopher Bickel in 2015, this was revealed to be late designer/costumier Michael Baldwin, who also worked on The Rolling Stones' Rock And Roll Circus and regularly made cameos in pop videos he was working on. And now – can anyone say who the burly gent was who appeared in the videos for Frankie Goes To Hollywood's Relax and The Damned's Grimly Fiendish?

HIT THE SKIDS

Regarding the band Skid Row (the Irish one, with Gary Moore): I recently bought an LP called *Skid Row* (AKA *Dublin Gas Comy*). All my online searches indicate that they recorded two LPs during their lifespan, the first one being *Skid* (1970), followed by *34 Hours* (1971). Was it, as I suspect, a 'first' first album only destined for the Irish market?
Vincent Prieux, Lyon, France

MOJO says: *This* Skid Row LP, believed to be from mid-1970, was released in the UK and features early versions of songs which appeared on *Skid*, plus both sides of the band's first Irish single (including New Faces, Old Places, sung by early member Phil Lynott). It's thought that it was withdrawn to make way for the re-recorded debut proper, though for some inexplicable reason the two LPs share the same CBS label catalogue number S 63965 (later reissues also mix up the tracklisting). Sorry for heaping mystery upon mystery, Vincent – can anyone shed light?

PRISONERS OF THE KING

Re the letter from Robert J. Hurns, MOJO 357 (was Pete Sinfield influenced by The Schizoid Man episode of The Prisoner?), I suggest that the music by Albert Elms was also lapped up by the band. There is a musical theme in that episode which is in triplets woozily sawing between two notes that then rises at the end. There are a number of variations in this and other episodes, often with odd-tuned percussion and distorted electric guitar. It is very reminiscent of the main phrase in Larks' Tongues In Aspic, Part Two by the post-Sinfield version of King Crimson of 1973. Whether or not Robert Fripp's use of repetitive rhythms and climbing key changes under squealing guitar and electric violin were inspired by The Schizoid Man, it only goes to highlight how adventurous and prescient Elms's ideas were.
Glyn Wilcox, via e-mail

HELP MOJO

How did the English engineer John Burns get selected (with Dick Cuthell) to create the dub mix of Burning Spear's *Marcus Garvey* album, titled *Garvey's Ghost*? Cuthell had reggae connections as a horn player but I am not aware of Burns ever working on any other reggae album and certainly no other dub albums.
Jim Hori, via e-mail

MOJO says: John Burns' other credits include Genesis, Jethro Tull, Blodwyn Pig and Spooky Tooth, so we'd love to know the answer!

CONTACT MOJO

Have you got a challenging musical question for the MOJO Brains Trust? E-mail **askmojo@bauermedia.co.uk** and we'll help untangle your trickiest puzzles.

Sound, Sound, Deeper In Sound

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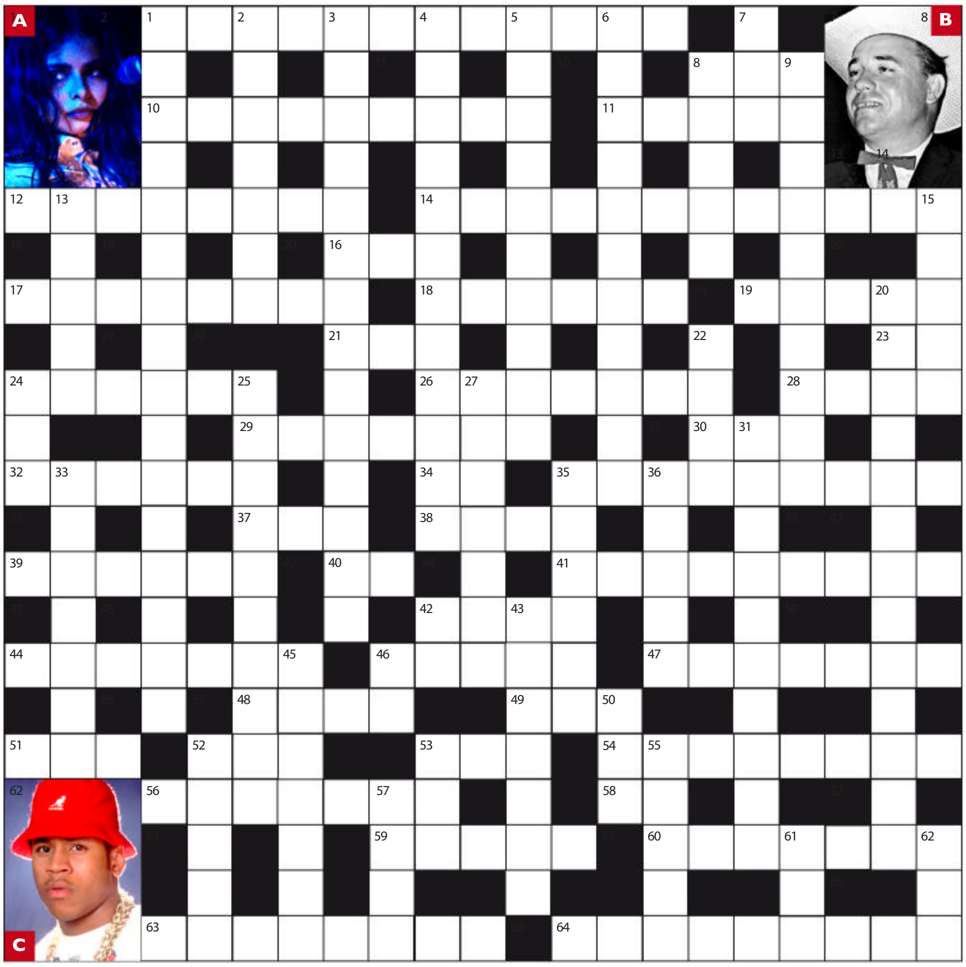
ANSWERS

MOJO 357

Across: 1 Mick Avory, 5 Basho, 9 King Porter Stomp, 10 Transition, 14 Gene, 15 Lagos, 18 Diet, 19 Amok, 20 Ripcord, 21 Four, 22 Vogue, 23 Lyceum, 24 Skin, 25 Enya, 26 MBE, 29 Era, 30 Irregular, 31 Teasers, 34 Wabash, 37 Aisles, 41 Man, 42 Beyoncé, 43 Stu, 44 MDNA, 46 Identity, 49 Stan Kenton, 50 Jet Set, 51 Susanna, 52 Tanglefoot, 53 Belief, 54 Zips, 55 Regents, 57 Cash, 60 Ys, 61 Aqueous, 64 UA, 65 Brutalism, 66 Maria.

Down: 1 Making Plans For Nigel, 2 Cuneiform, 3 Amp Fiddler, 4 Rats, 6 Art Bears, 7 Home Lovin' Man, 8 Freedom, 11 Re-Ron, 12 Oi, 13 Newcleus, 16 Akon, 17 Oeuvres, 21 Future Tense, 25 Eat, 27 BIS, 28 Bad, 32 Electra, 33 Racketeers, 34 Walt Jabsco, 35 Andy Smith, 36 Heart Of Asia, 38 It, 39 LSD, 40 Sun, 45 Stronger, 46 Instinct, 47 Tinnitus, 48 Ye, 56 Sal, 58 Aum, 59 SSA, 60 Ya, 62 Qi, 63 EM.

Winners: Rebekah Fovargue of **Darlington** wins an Orange Box speaker and **Karl Kitts** of **Liverpool** wins an Orange Box-L.



Getty (3)

ACROSS

1 Pulp's singer and thrower of shapes (6,6)
8 Betty, or maybe Mr Hewerdine? (3)
10 Hüsker Dü play serene fruit machines (3,6)
11 Frankie's risqué 1984 smash (5)
12 Caribou's alter-ego (8)
14 See photoclue A (4,8)
16 Shannon, Amitri or Tha Funkee Homosapien? (3)
17 A date for presents for The Sugarcubes, The Peddlers and The Association (8)
18 Watching the dawn with Jean-Luc Ponty in '76 (6)
19 EMI's West German label, releaser of the Fabs (5)
21 Anti-fascist Sheffield studio (3)
23 All-female NY No-Wavers (2)
24 Harry Nilsson's spinach-powered OST of 1980 (6)
26 Breakbeat veteran Paradox, 10-sided in 2019? (7)
28 One of the higher-pitched saxes (4)
29 Morgan, May or Harriott (6)
30 Cabaret Voltaire did it thrice (3)
32 VdGG's murderous *Pawn Hearts* song (3-3)
34 Chuck D refuses in '96 (2)
35 Marillion's third Top 30 hit (9)
37 The Tony Williams Lifetime's 1971 sense of self (3)
38 The DC5 felt it All Over (4)
39 Steely Dan's last LP for 20 years (6)
40 Dylan sang these Blues, a Waltz and a City, all by Woody Guthrie (2)
41 Thea Gilmore's landslide in '03? (9)
42 Sugababes' reflection on body image (4)
44 Crossers of the *Red Sea*, The ------- (7)
46 Derek And The Dominos' signature hit (5)
47 James Brown feels an invisible force (7)
48 Slipknot LP about their home state (4)
49 Creed Taylor's label (3)
51 Singular mood felt by U2, Metallica and Bob James (3)
52 London label, home to Jessie Ware and Disclosure (3)
53 Plastic --- Band (3)
54 Simon & Garfunkel's added part to Scarborough Fair (8)
56 Howzat, they sang in 1976 (7)
58 Newman, Acoustics or Temple (1,1)
59 Belinda Carlisle's Francophone LP is here (5)
60 The Necks' pharmacist? (7)
63 Jethro Tull put their lips together and blow (The --------)(8)
64 Madness's nutty dancer (4,5)

DOWN

1 ---- -- --- ------- (Funk Is The Preacher) said James Blood Ulmer (4,2,3,7)
2 Stone, Face, New Barbarian (3,4)
3 Martha And The Vandellas in romantic mood in '66 (2,5,3,4)
4 Controversial posthumous Hendrix LP (5,7)
5 Their biggest seller was *At Budokan* (5,5)
6 See photoclue B (4,7)
7 Home of spiritual trance (3)
8 Lemon Jefferson, Blake or Willie Johnson (5)
9 Lieutenant Pigeon's roomy trousers (6,4)
13 Black Slate's chum (5)
15 At slow tempo (5)
20 Zeppelin hit the bars? (3,2,3,5)
22 Go To Him, Arthur Alexander told her (4)
24 --- Poko, Norwegian post-punkers (3)
25 *Warrior On The* --------- (Hawkwind) (4,2,4)
27 Rare Earth think of the planet in 1970 (7)
31 --------- *Table* (Solange) (1,4,2,3)
33 Venom's demonic drummer (7)
36 The Gaslight Anthem's was *American* (5)
42 British label, home to Brinsley Schwarz, Groundhogs, Man (2)
43 See photoclue C (1,1,4,1)
45 Don Fardon's former band The ------- (7)
46 On Sinatra's last solo LP, it was his Lady (2)
50 London space Weller played with EBTG in 1983 (3)
52 Vermont jam band (5)
53 Dalston's Café for jazz music (3)
55 City of Tangerine Dream's Bells (5)
57 ---- Graham Lee, Triffids pedal steel player (4)
61 Maternal Icelandic electro poppers? (3)
62 Japanese jazzers the Itabashi Fumio Trio's 1976 opus (3)

Class act: Pulp (clockwise from left) Jarvis Cocker, Nick Banks, Steven Havenhand, Candida Doyle and Russell Senior, Sheffield, 1987.

Nick Banks and Pulp

It began with a rogue bulldog. And went into hibernation when "other things" beckoned.

HELLO LATE 1986

In 1982, me and my girlfriend were promoting bands at a pub in Sheffield called The Hallamshire. I'd sit at the top of the stairs taking the 50p door money. One night these two lads said, "Can we just sit here and listen?" It was Jarvis Cocker and his mate, Tim Allcard, who had a kind of weird-looking beard.

Fast forward a couple of months and we heard about this group Pulp playing at the Crucible – not the one where the snooker's played. So we went [on October 4, 1982] and it really did blow me away. There was piano, acoustic guitars, tooting trombones, and this lanky git wearing glasses doing this shoulder shuffle dance, *talking* to the audience between songs. I was gobsmacked, and we tried to see them as many times as we could.

Fast forward a few years. I was in the Leadmill one afternoon and stuck to the noticeboard was, 'Pulp want a drummer, call this number.' People say your heart skips a beat at certain moments, and it literally did, because it was my chance to join my favourite band. I went to the Leadmill that evening and there was Jarvis at the bar. I sidled up and said, Jarv, are you looking for a drummer? He said, "Yeah, come to the rehearsal garage on the weekend."

He was living in this quite rough area called Intake, but they had quite a nice house. I walked up the drive, and you could hear dogs barking. There was this white bulldog in the kitchen going apeshit, and another dog in another room, equally going apeshit. Jarv's going, "This bulldog's followed me home, I can't get rid of it. Let's walk around the streets, and then when it stops we'll run off." After about an hour we had to put it behind someone's garden fence and leg it. When we got back, Jarv said, "Oh, me grandma's cooked me tea, there's no time to play any music."

"Jarv said, 'Me grandma's cooked me tea, there's no time to play music.'"
NICK BANKS

I went back after a couple of weeks. The garage was damp and mostly full of junk, with a drum kit squashed into a corner and a ramshackle amp, with spiders falling on your head. I asked Jarvis a few months back, when I joined, were there any other applicants? And he kind of went, "No…" So I needn't have been quite so nerve-wracked, because no other bugger answered the advert.

GOODBYE DECEMBER 14, 2002

We Love Life [2001], and its predecessor *This Is Hardcore* [1998], were difficult to do, for differing reasons. When you've been together for the best part of 14 years, living 24/7 with the same four or five people… it gets tiring.

Geoff Travis, our manager, said, "Jarvis wants a break after this, he wants to do other things." Did we have a big meeting to talk things through? Ha ha ha! No. A band is about communicating to their audience, but often, they can be terrible at talking to each other. I would have said, "Keep going…", but playing the drums, etc, I'm not the one who's become elevated into the public consciousness. And for years, Pulp were kids looking through a sweet shop window. Then, when you can have what you want, you gorge yourself and then you feel sick. Then you are sick.

The last gig we did was the Magna Centre in Rotherham, which was a sort of circularity, because the first ever Pulp gig [in July 1980] was at the Rotherham Arts Centre. When you're playing, you're thinking, Don't cock it up! It was coming off stage that you think, This may be the last time we play these songs to these people that love our music. A bittersweet moment. In the dressing room, there was no bants and joshing around, it was quite sombre. Afterwards, I think we went for more drinks. Then you're sort of left wandering around the house looking for something, and you don't really know what it is. Eventually you have to make some decisions: I took over the family business.

Eight years later we did pull Pulp out of the garage – topped up the tank, gave it a polish, off you go… and now we're doing it again. Our stuff seems to still have a vibrancy and freshness, and people are having a great time. Part of the concert is a tribute to Steve [Mackey, late bassist] and how he did so much to bring Pulp on. Usually, Steve was in the position in front of me, so we always had that on-stage connection. He is definitely missed.

Are Pulp still my favourite band? Well, I've seen under the bonnet, I've seen the guts and gore… but certainly, I wouldn't have wanted to be in any other band.

As told to Ian Harrison

Nick Banks' memoir So It Started There: From Punk To Pulp is published by Omnibus on September 28.

Loving life: Pulp (from left) Banks, Mark Webber, Doyle, Steve Mackey, Cocker, July 2001; (left) Banks today.

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